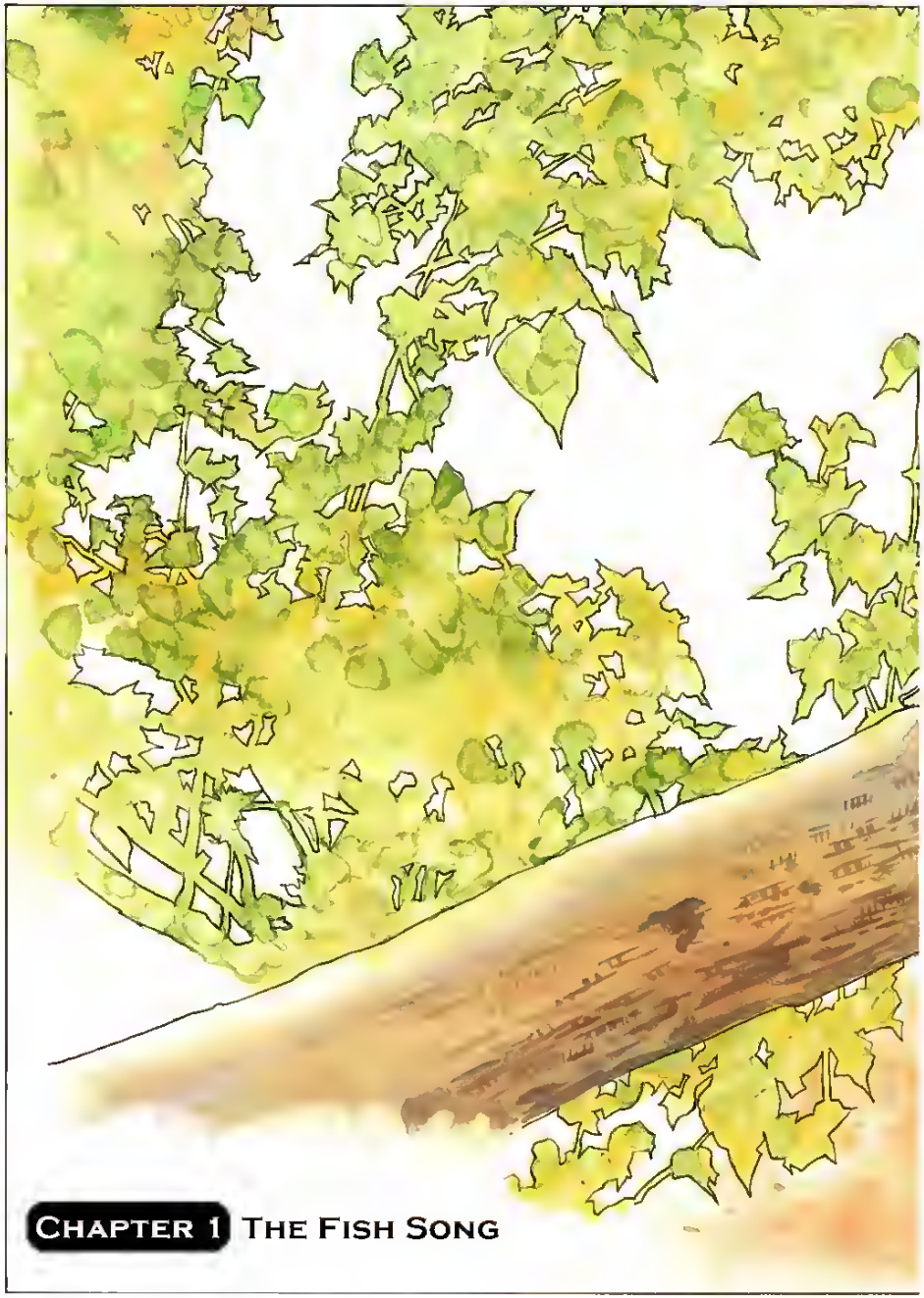
神童

Shindo

Volume 1



Chapter 1 The Fish Song

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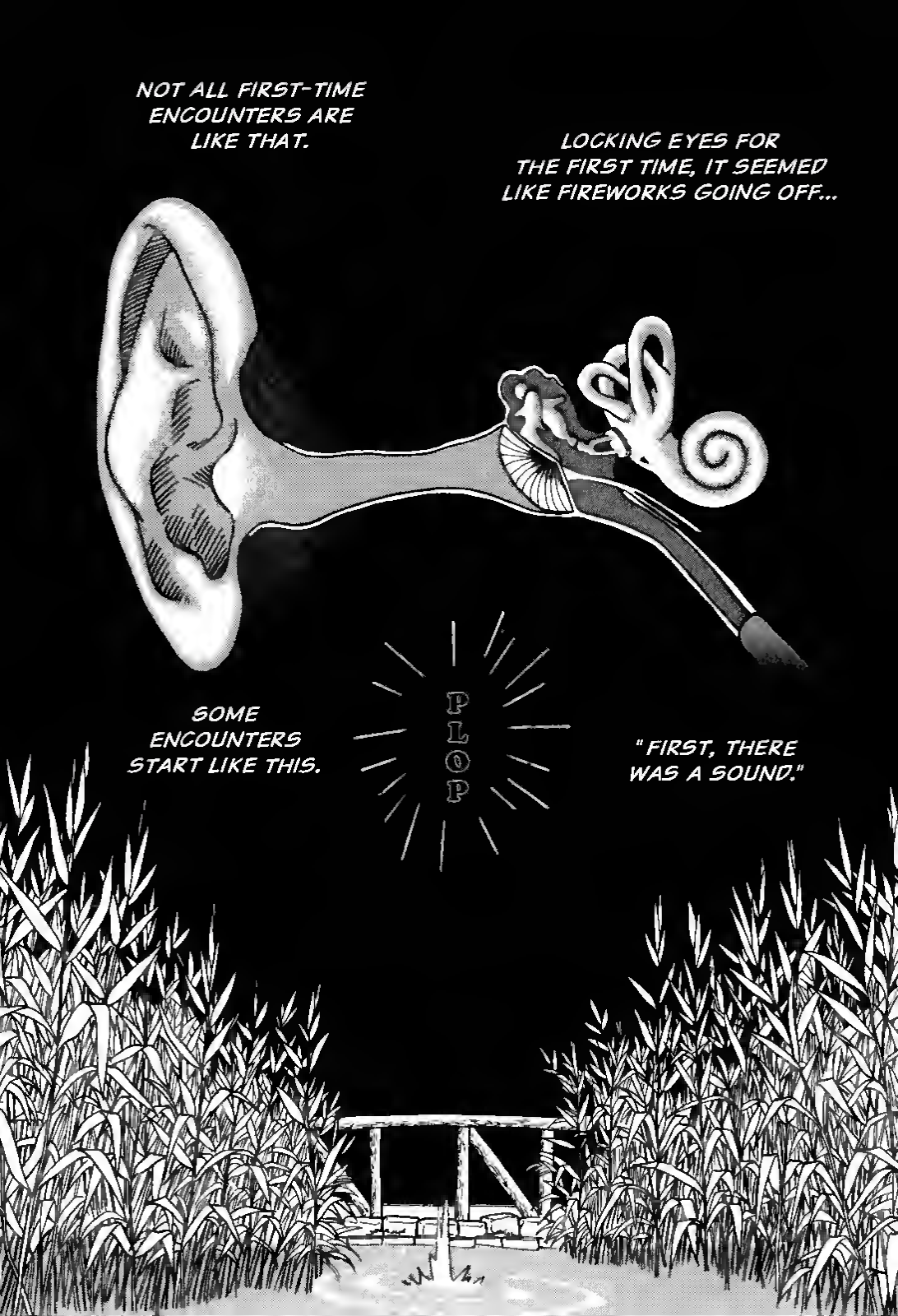
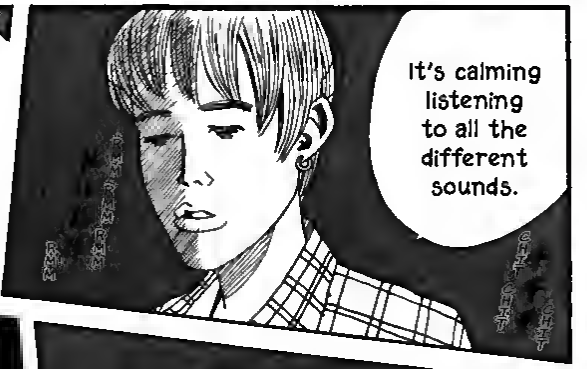
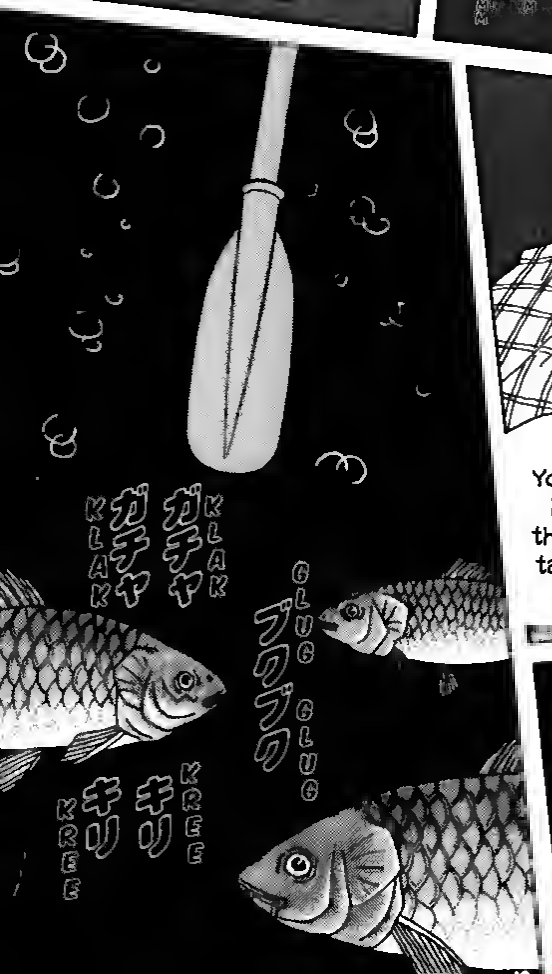

NOT ALL FIRST-TIME ENCOUNTERS ARE LIKE THAT.
LOCKING EYES FOR THE FIRST TIME, IT SEEMED LIKE FIREWORKS GOING OFF...
SOME ENCOUNTERS START LIKE THIS.
PLOP
"FIRST, THERE WAS A SOUND."

Hey!
What?
Did a ball come this way?
Yeah.
Where those reeds are over there.
Gimme a lift.
Hey! That's dangerous!
HOP

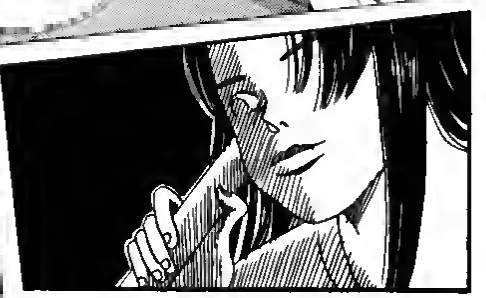
It should be free at this time of night.
Are you allowed to take the boat out at night?
RMM RMM RMM
リリリ
REE REE REE

...and the fish...
...and the birds...
Like the bugs...

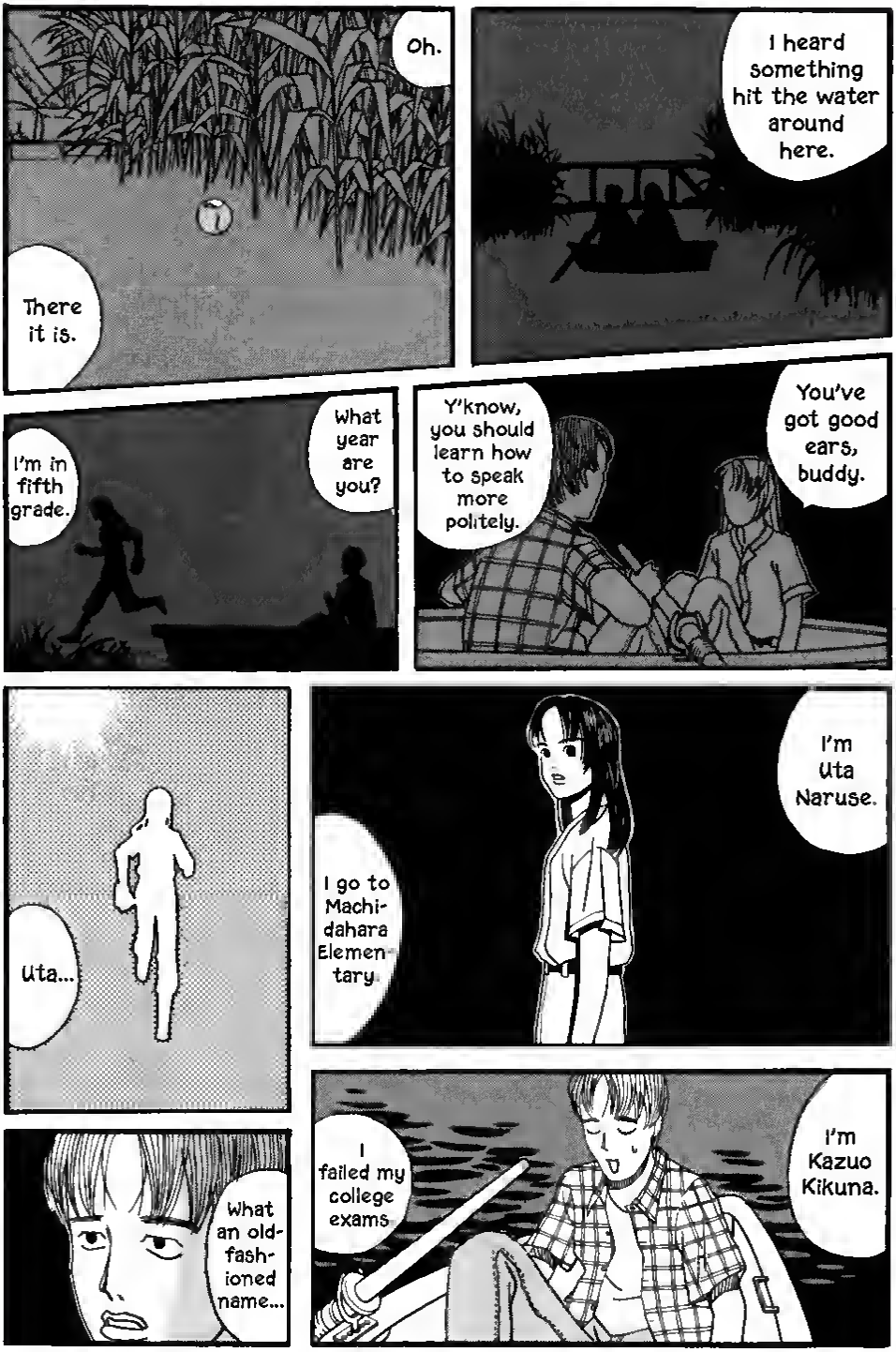

It's calming listening to all the different sounds.

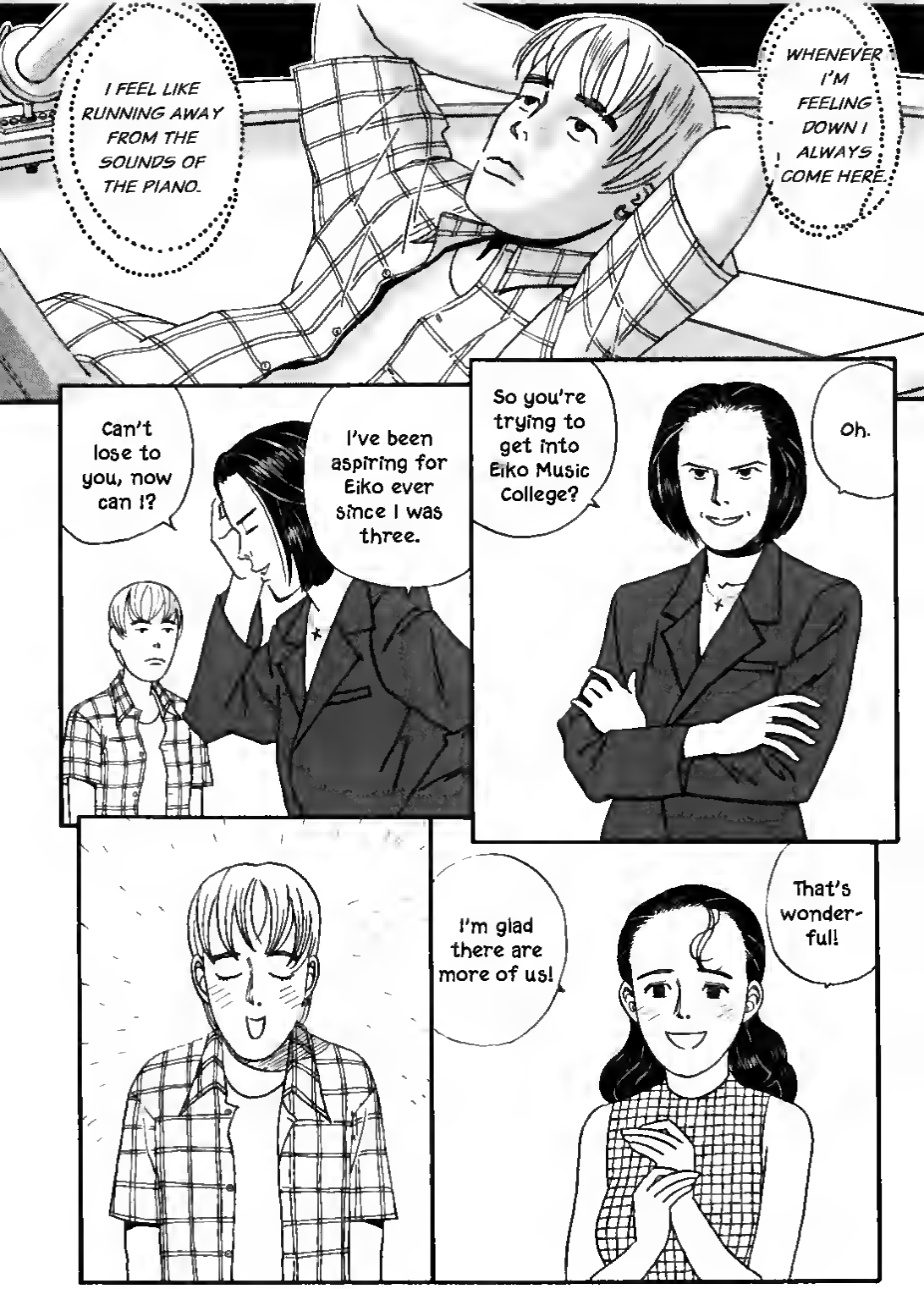

KLAK
ガチャ
KLAK
GLUG GLUG
ブクブク
KREE
キリ
KREE

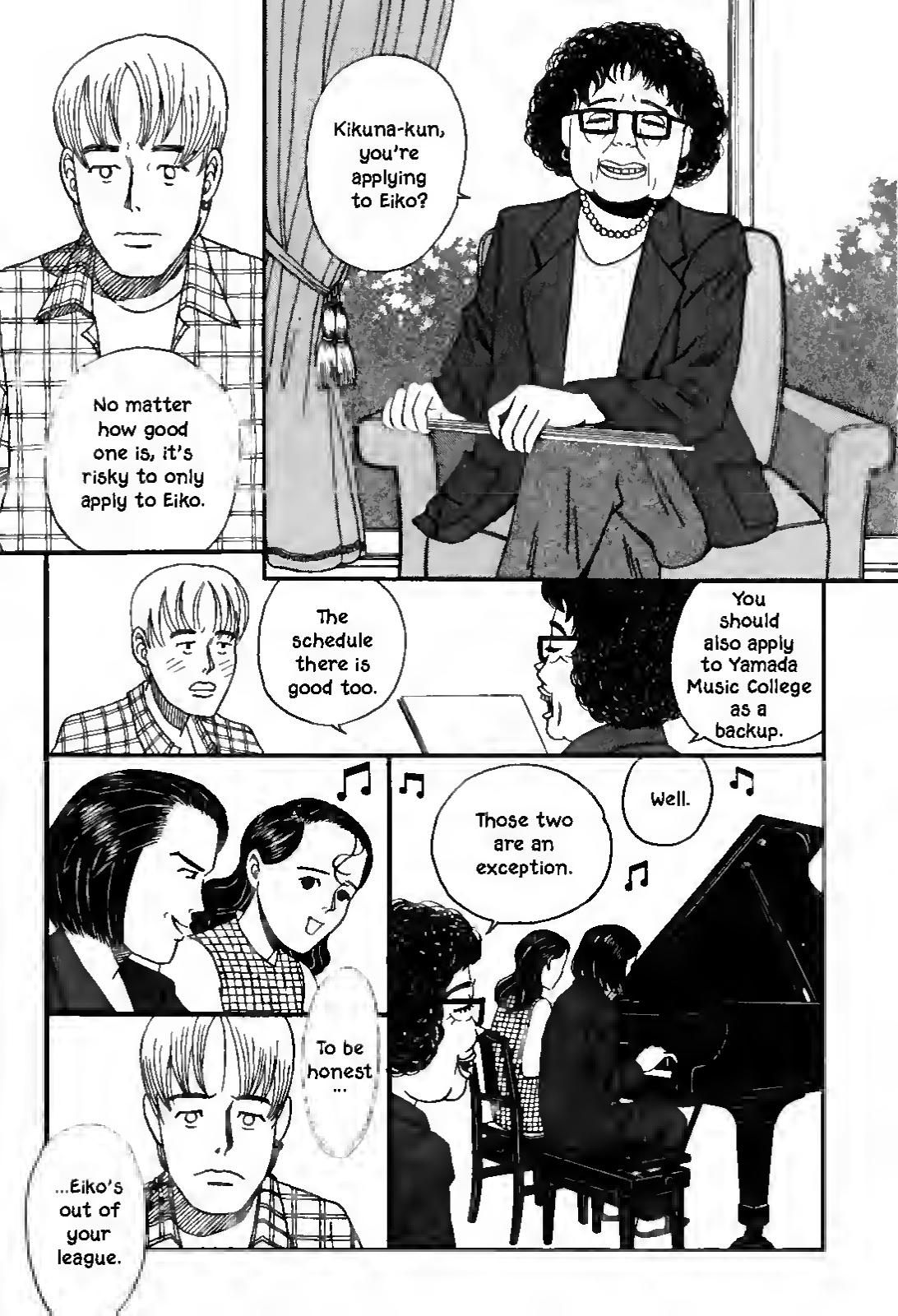
The fish?
Put your ear against the oar.
You can hear the fish talking.



Ohh...
That's the first time I've ever heard that.


Oh.
There it is.
I heard something hit the water around here.
What year are you?
I'm in fifth grade.
Y'know, you should learn how to speak more politely.
You've got good ears, buddy.
Uta...
I'm Uta Naruse.
I go to Machi-dahara Elemen-tary.
What an old-fash-ioned name...
I failed my college exams
I'm Kazuo Kikuna.

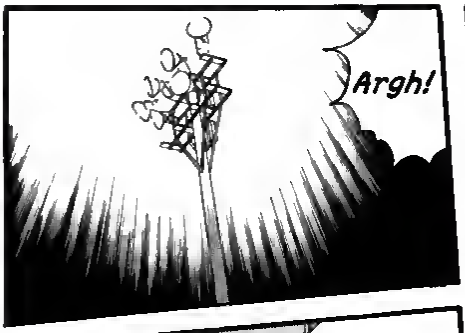

I FEEL LIKE RUNNING AWAY FROM THE SOUNDS OF THE PIANO.
WHENEVER I'M FEELING DOWN I ALWAYS COME HERE.
Can't lose to you, now can I?
I've been aspiring for Eiko ever since I was three.
So you're trying to get into Eiko Music College?
Oh.
I'm glad there are more of us!
That's wonderful!


Kikuna-kun, you're applying to Eiko?
No matter how good one is, it's risky to only apply to Eiko.
The schedule there is good too.
You should also apply to Yamada Music College as a backup.
Those two are an exception.
Well.
To be honest ...
...Eiko's out of your league.

Hey, it's that girl!
ヒュイイイ
VEEN
She's the pitcher.
スパーン
WHAP
ヒュー
WHOO

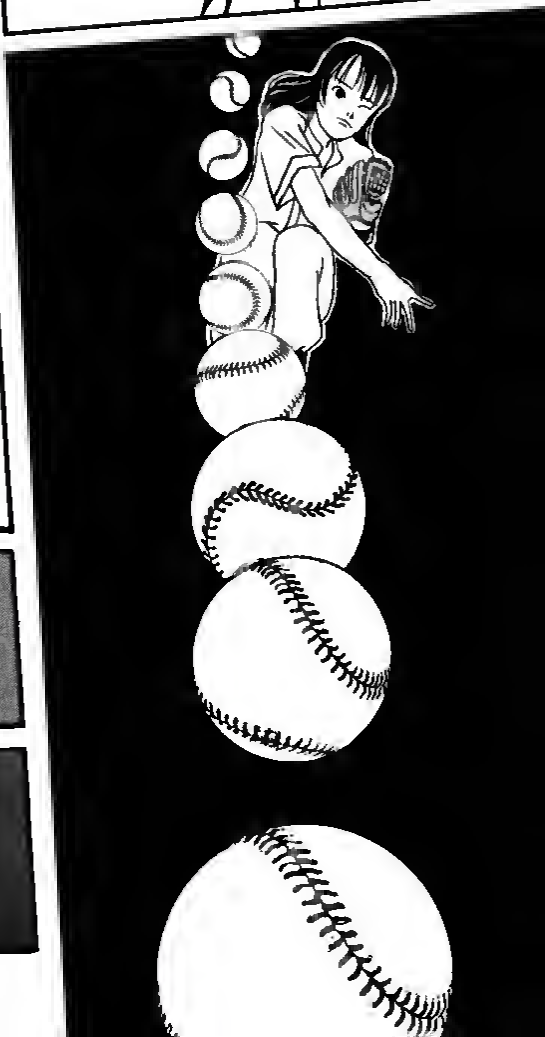
Her pitch is so sharp, it's mind-blowing.
Whoaaa...
Her perfect form...
The flexibility of her arm's snap...
It's all effortless.
Third base!
Her long fingers can throw breaking balls with ease.
WHAK

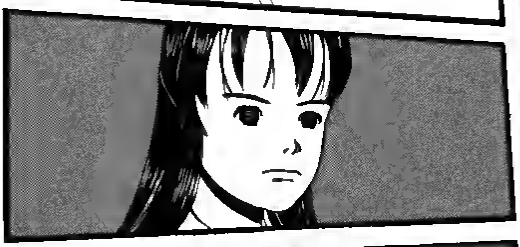
Hmph!
SHUFF
SHUFF
Why'd you miss that, you loser?!
Hey, stupid!
...has got a bad attitude.
Geez, that girl...
Today's kinda humid so...
H-Hey...
...it's gonna really ...
This is next!
Hey, catcher!

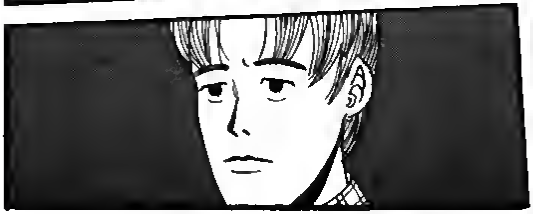

Argh!

H-Hey, w-wait ...!
...drop!

Hey, Uta!
Someone fill in for him.
It totally beaned him in the balls.
Not me.



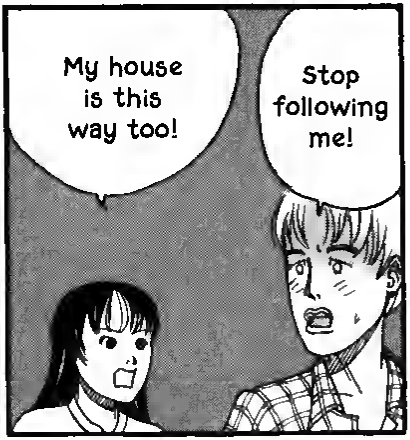




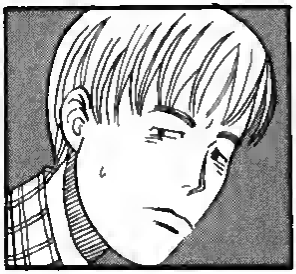
I can't risk hurting my fingers.
I don't play ball sports.
No way.
Wanna play catch?
So you play the piano?
Ohh ...
BEETHOV
You must be joking.
Teach me how to play.

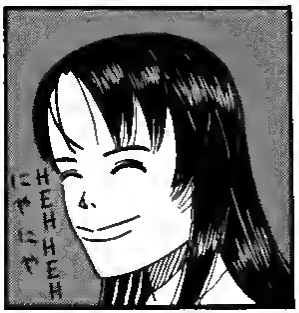
.....

Go ahead, assault me.
What if I were some pervert who assaults young kids?


My house is this way too!
Stop following me!

Brat.




HEHHEH
にゃにゃ

Though you'd still get busted even if I had said it was okay.
.....

You've got a piano in the grocery store?
KIKUNA GROCERY
Huh?
No one's talking about snacks, you brat!
Oh, if you're talking about snacks, I'd like something chocolatey.
Who's the kid?
Wao.
You can assault her if you want.
Translator's Note: The kanji character for "Kazuo" can also be pronounced "Wao."
Oh!
Who said you could go up there?!
Ah!
So the piano's upstairs, huh...?
Hey, you!

A piano.
It's a beat-up piano. The heat and the humidity's screwed up the sound.
Oh, it's Beyer's Piano Lessons for Beginners.
It's still in good shape.
I started playing when I was 12.
That's why the book's still in good shape.
BEYER FOR CHILDREN
Oh yeah?
.....
I can play a little Beyer.
Don't!
The neighbors get mad if we play at night.

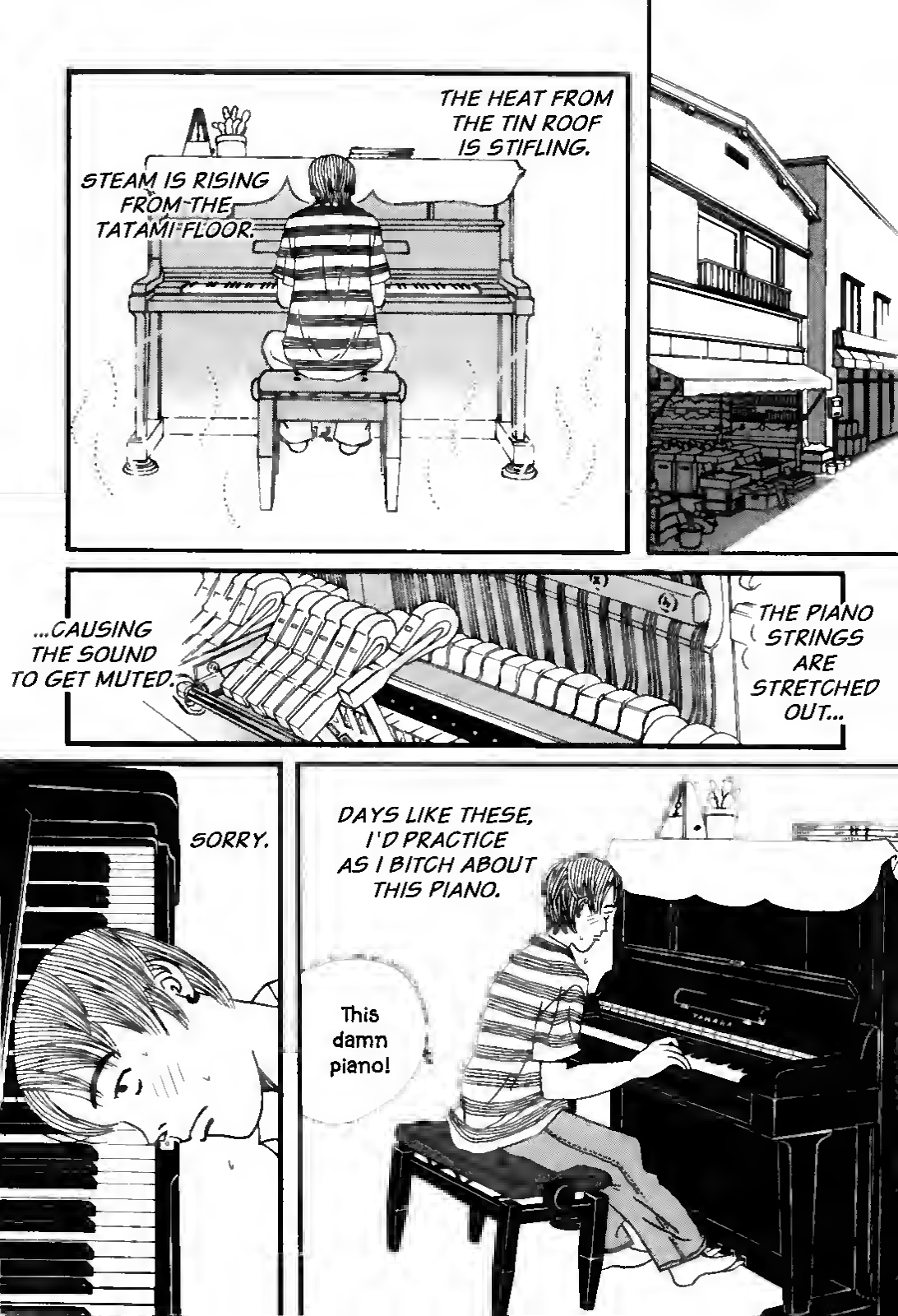
?!
So this is "C."
Oh.
Hey! I told you not to!
I played this when I was little!
Oops, made a mistake.
This is hard, right?
Hey!

There's no way I could make that sound...
ポーン
PING
How did you...
...make that sound?
A piano doesn't make the same sound...
...no matter who is playing it.
Only the real deal...
...can make it sound like that.
What can you really play?!
Mozart or Beethoven?
BEYER FOR CHILDREN
Or Liszt or Rachmaninoff?

Let go of me!
BEYER FOR CHILDREN

Hey! Don't play the piano at night...
SLIDE
PLINK
The Fish Song.
KIKUNA

Chapter 2 The Bird Song


THE HEAT FROM THE TIN ROOF IS STIFLING.
STEAM IS RISING FROM THE TATAMI FLOOR.
...CAUSING THE SOUND TO GET MUTED.
THE PIANO STRINGS ARE STRETCHED OUT...
SORRY.
DAYS LIKE THESE, I'D PRACTICE AS I BITCH ABOUT THIS PIANO.
This damn piano!

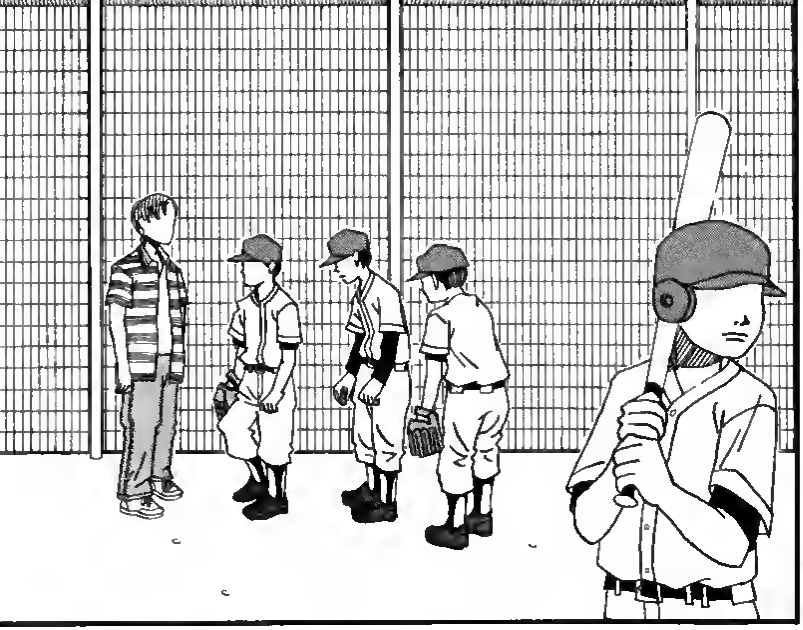
BUT THAT GIRL WAS ABLE TO BRING OUT A BEAUTIFUL SOUND FROM YOU.
SOMEWHERE IN MY HEART I'D BLAME THE FACT THAT I DIDN'T IMPROVE ON YOU.

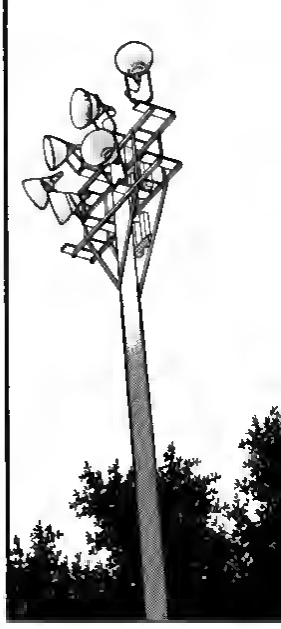
...play such a sound?
How can I...

...SO...
...SO...

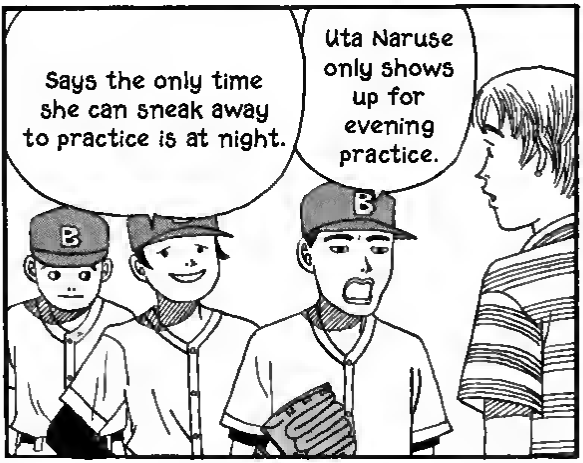
HOW DID...
...THAT BRAT PLAY...

...SOFTLY...
...LIKE A TOUCH OF A FEATHER...
She shouldn't be playing baseball!
BUT IF SHE HURTS HER FINGERS, SHE WON'T BE ABLE TO PLAY LIKE THAT ANYMORE...
SIGH





'Cause she smacks us whenever we make a mistake.
Though we practice better when she isn't here.


Says the only time she can sneak away to practice is at night.
Uta Naruse only shows up for evening practice.

I decided to drop by after my lesson.
SNEAK SNEAK SNEAK
SNEAK

GULP
ピクッ
I'm here you know.

What's up, Wao?
The name's Kazuo.
But your dad called you Wao.
That doesn't mean you get to.
I have something to say...
...to you.
You...
...should stop playing baseball.
That's the same thing...
...my mama said.

...more than the piano.
'Cause I like playing baseball...
Nope!
Aren't you afraid of hurting your fingers?
You should listen to adults sometimes.
Y'know...
Mama!
HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
Get away from her!

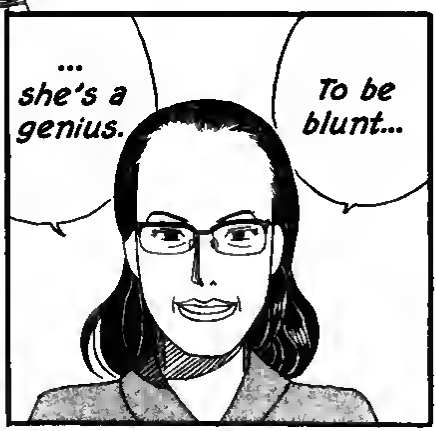
Is that true?!
Uh... I'm...
He's super talented.
シゲ STARE
シゲ STARE
シゲ STARE
Friend? Well...
This is a friend from my piano teacher's.
Huh? So then...
When you didn't come home on time I got worried and came outside.
So.
Come in and have some tea, Wao.
This is my house.
ギ" ラ GLARE
GULP

...considering your mom does your homework for you?
What kind of attitude is that...
Well, that's odd.
That homework you did for me was all wrong, Mama. Everyone laughed at me.
Huh?
No one asked for your opinion.
You go practice.
And do your homework for you.
'Kay.
Come.
I'll serve him tea.
I don't make her do a single thing outside of music in this house.

Hurry and drink up.
This is awkward.

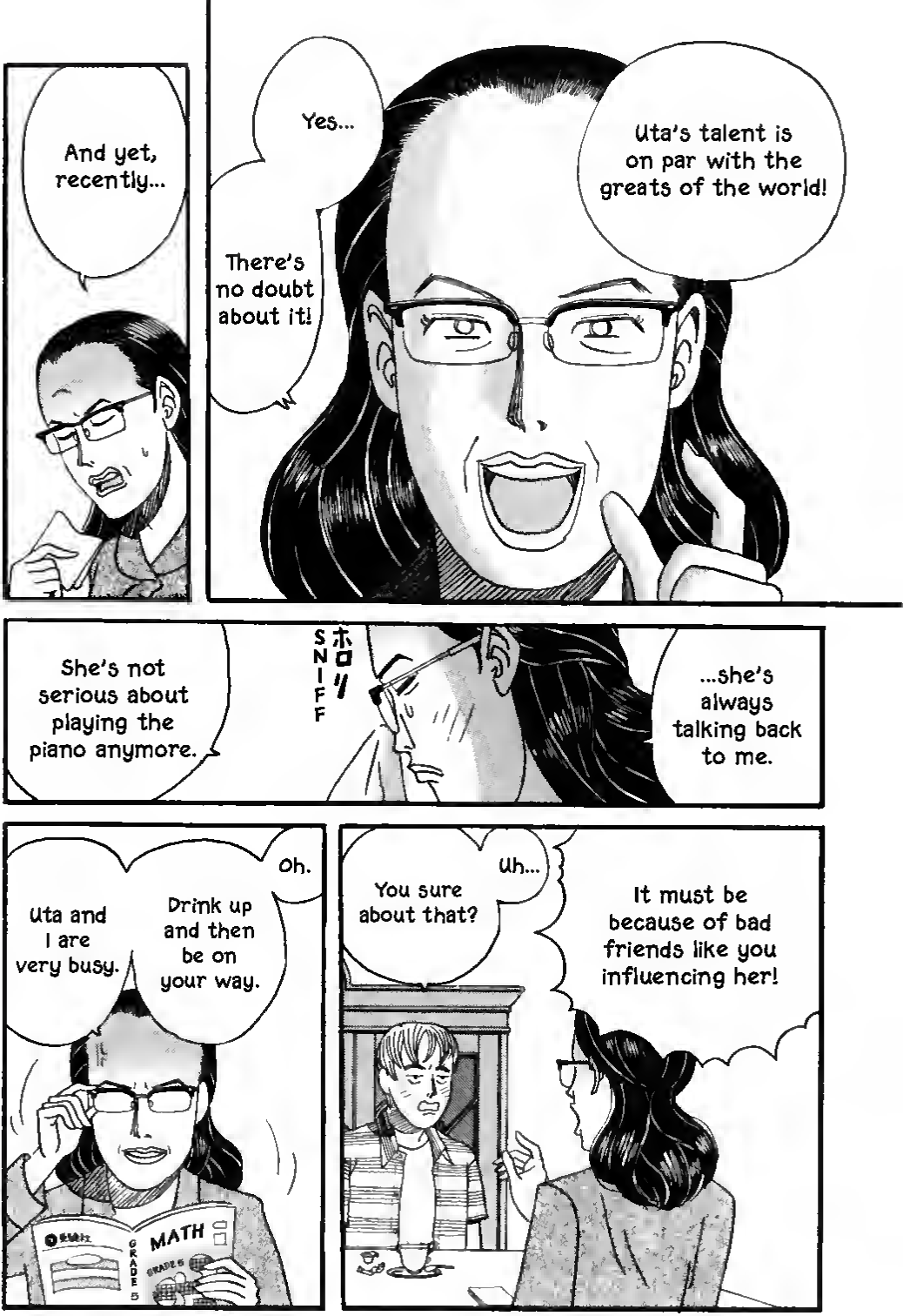
ずっ
SLUURP

STAB
You wouldn't even compare.


...
she's a genius.
To be blunt...

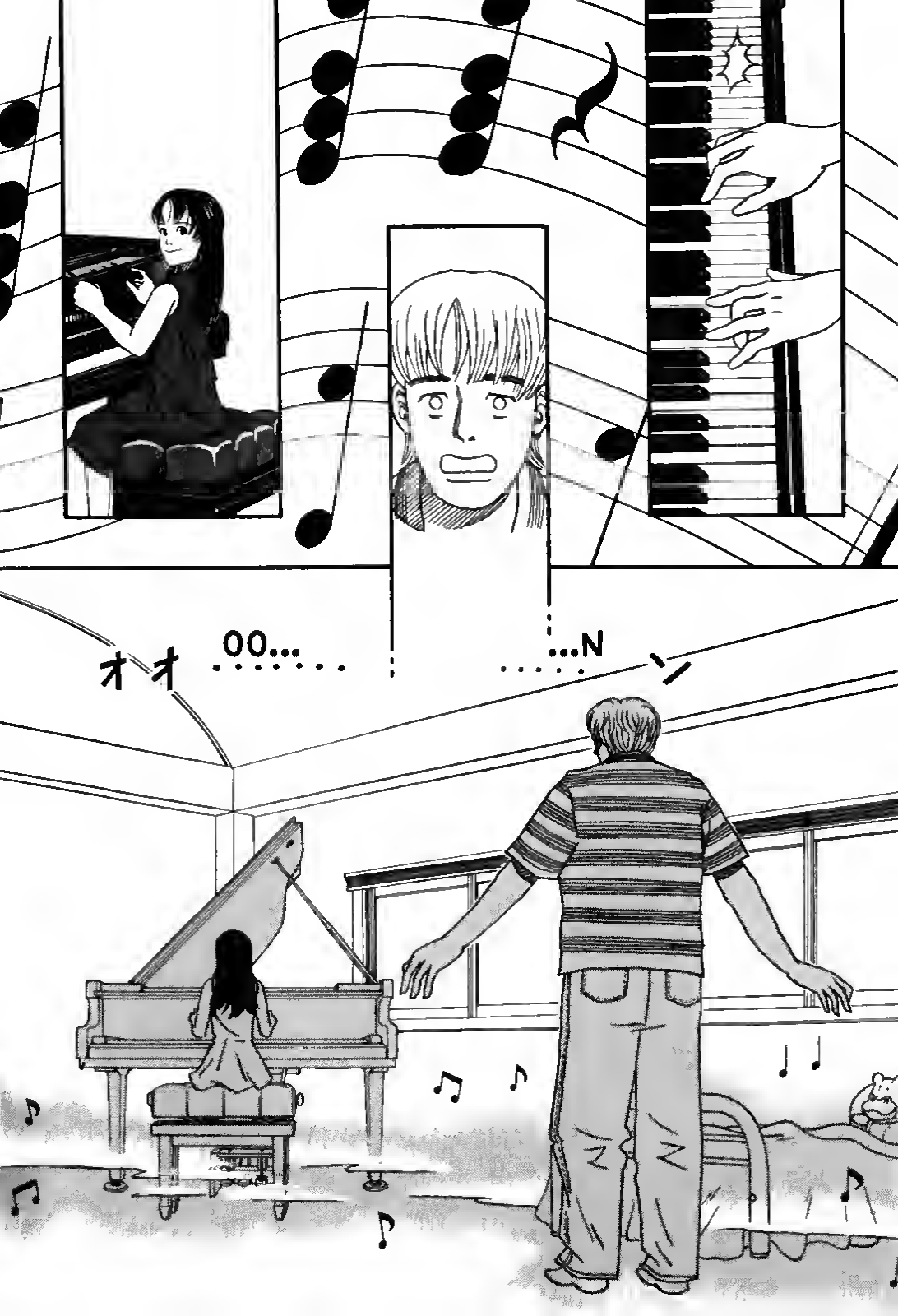
CHI
PROD
UT
NARA
6才でリサイ
Whoa...
世に神数ある
の神童
テクニ
互角で
特筆す
音色の
の域に
こと

CHILD PRODIGY UTA NARABE
This is an article from when she gave a recital when she was six.

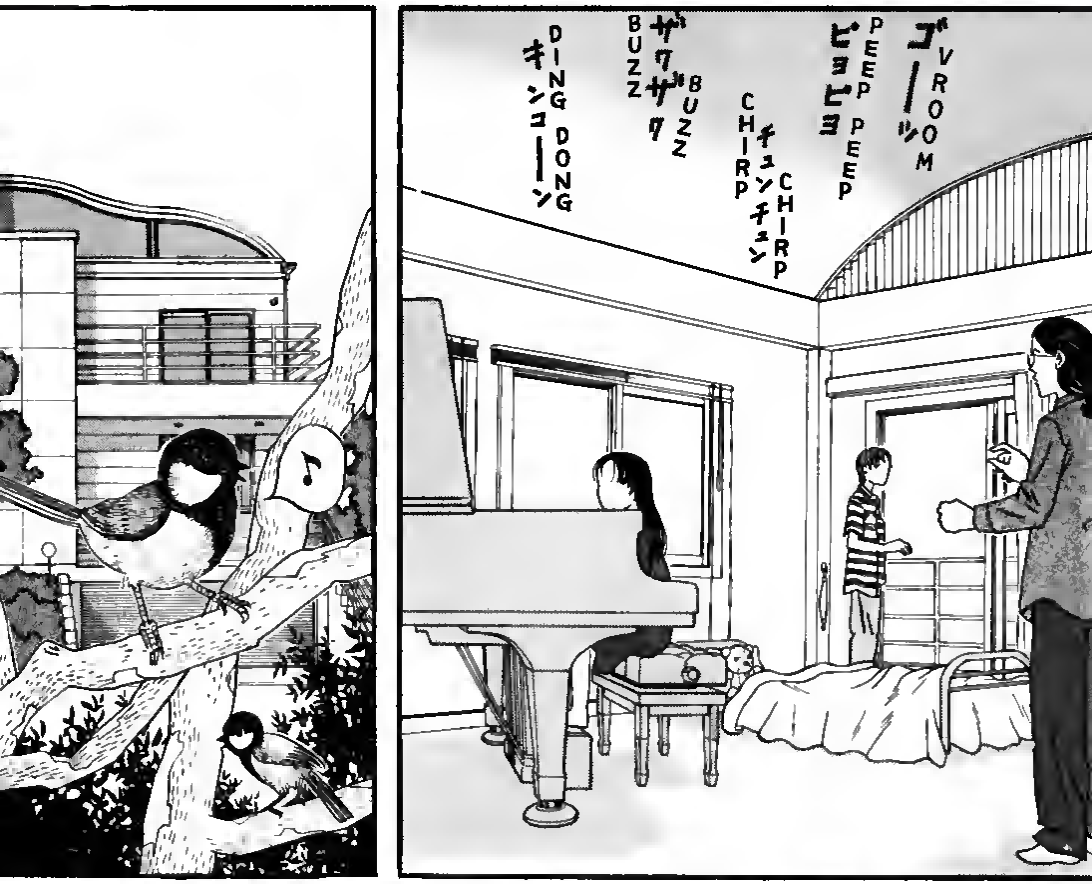

And yet, recently...
Yes...
There's no doubt about it!
Uta's talent is on par with the greats of the world!
She's not serious about playing the piano anymore.
ホロリ
SNIFF
...she's always talking back to me.
Oh.
Uta and I are very busy.
Drink up and then be on your way.
MATH
GRADE 5
Uh...
You sure about that?
It must be because of bad friends like you influencing her!

THAT'S EVEN BETTER THAN WHAT I HEARD FROM THE SECOND FLOOR OF THE GROCERY STORE...
WOW...
You don't look like you would...
You don't, do you?
Um...
Huh?!
Do you understand this equation?
MATH
GRADE 5

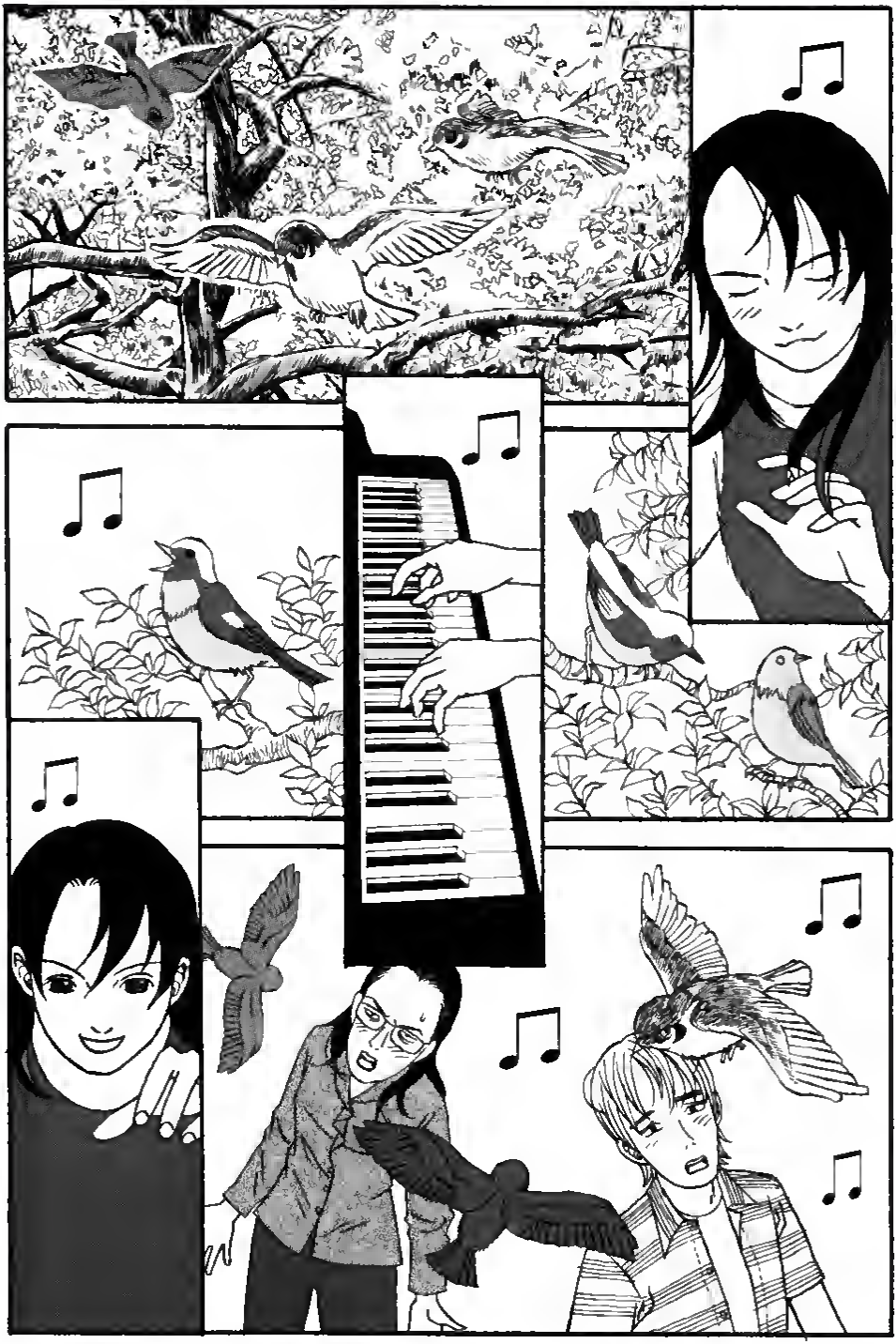
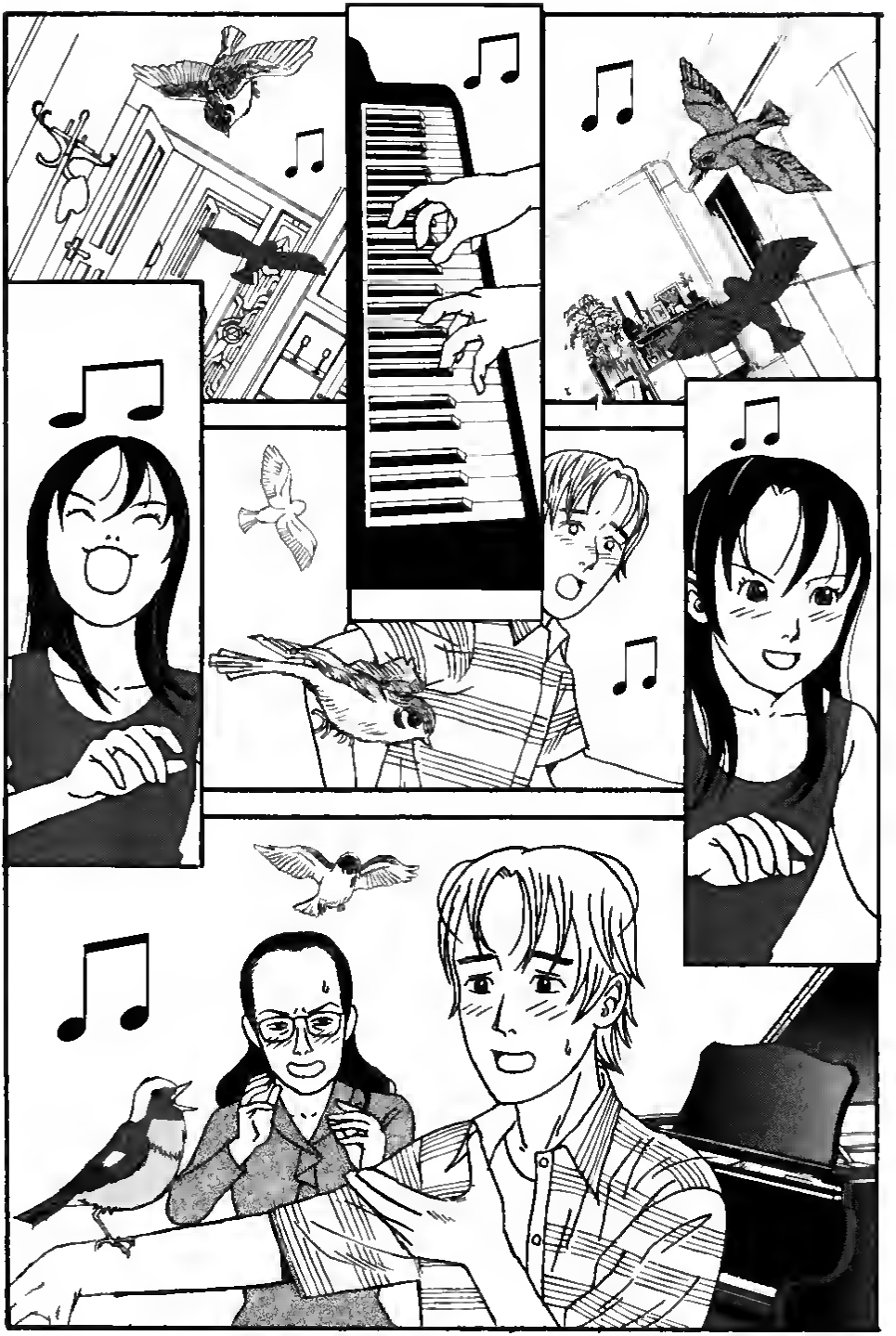
...did I put that reference book?
Hmm, now where...

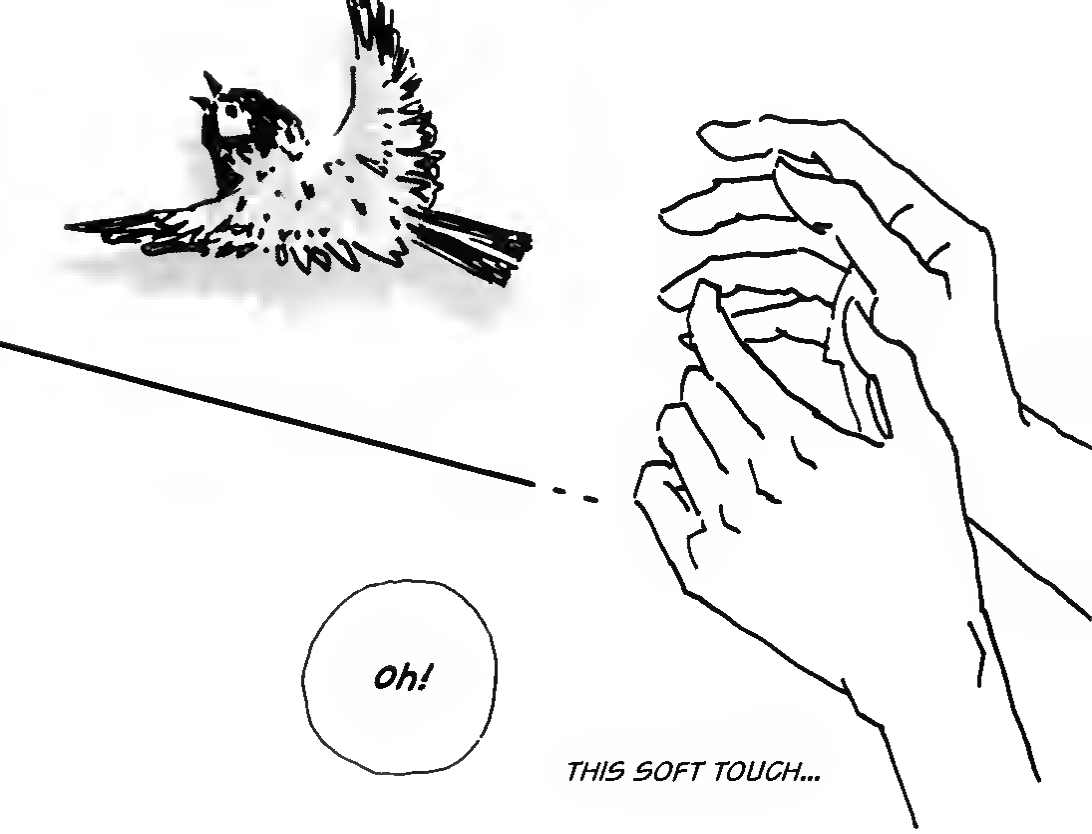

オオ
OO...
...N
ン

ガラガラ
CLATTER
ガラガラ
CLATTER
オ♪
O...
I dunno...
But I wanted to free this music.
...ン
Ha ha ha!
J-Just what do you think you're doing?!


...in order to maintain the perfect conditions for the piano!
The air in this room is strictly controlled...
ゴーン VROOM
ピョピョヨ PEEP PEEP PEEP
チュンチュン CHIRP CHIRP
ザザザ BUZZ BUZZ
キンコーン DING DONG
...is fun!
Oh. This...

Whoa!
UTA, YOUR MUSIC...
...WILL CHANGE THE WORLD.

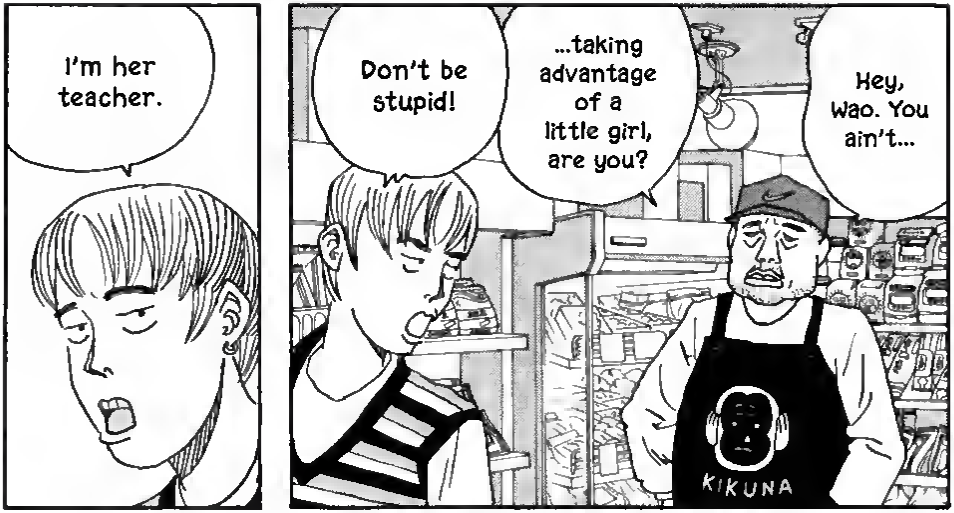



oh!
THIS SOFT TOUCH...

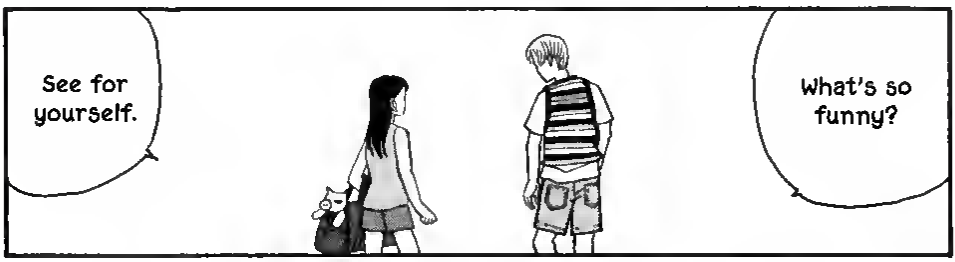
Chapter 3 The Baseball Song

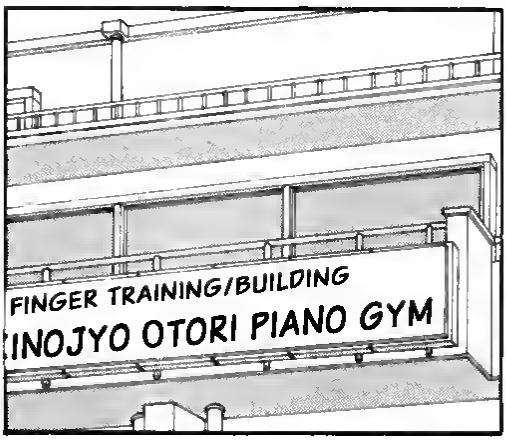
わ
WA
KIKUNA GROCERY
Wao!

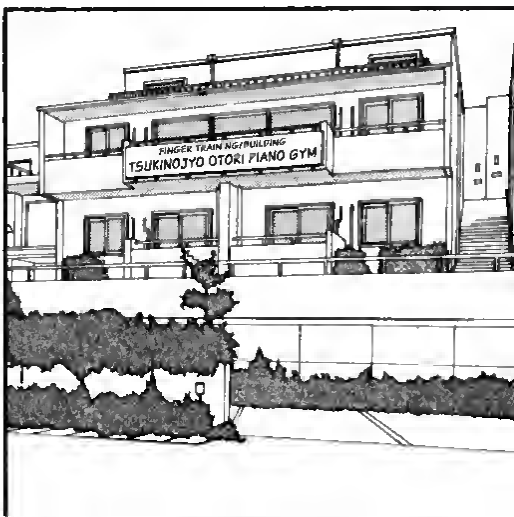
I wanna show you something funny.

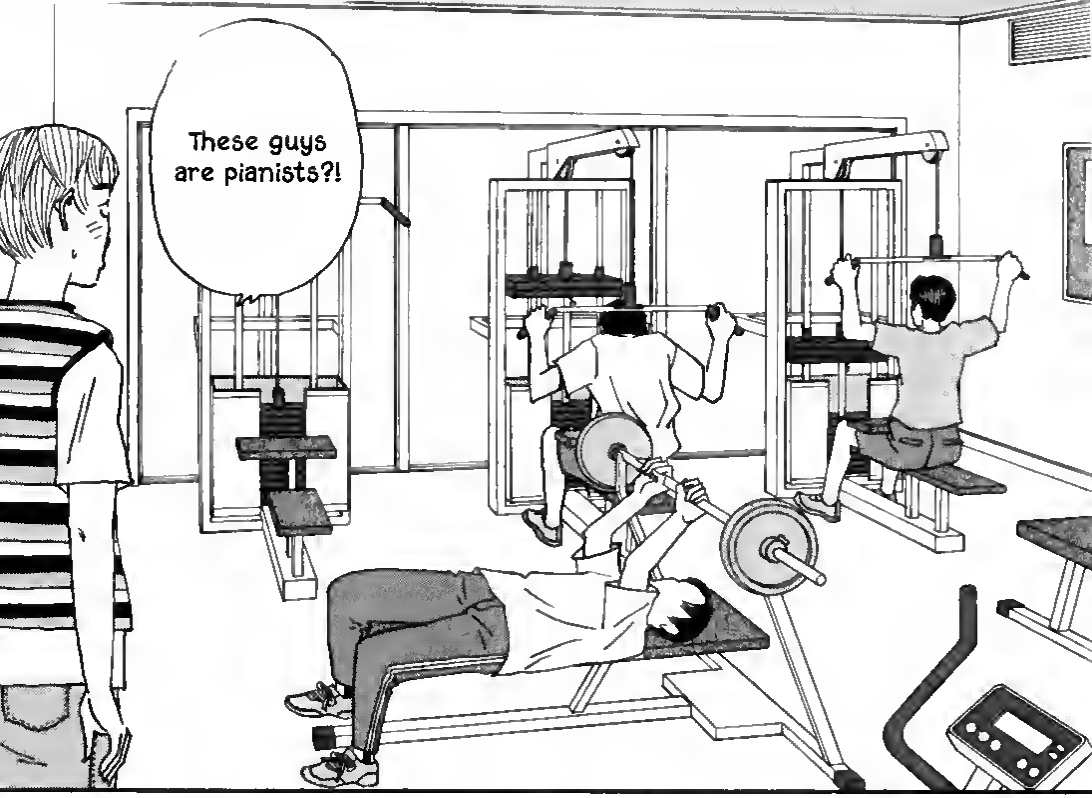

I'm her teacher.
Don't be stupid!
...taking advantage of a little girl, are you?
Hey, Wao. You ain't...
KIKUNA

Teacher...?


See for yourself.
What's so funny?

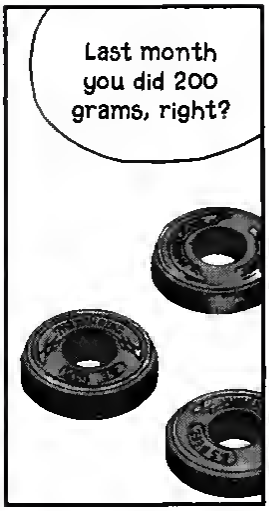

FINGER TRAINING/BUILDING
INOJYO OTORI PIANO GYM


FINGER TRAINING/BUILDING
TSUKINOJYO OTORI PIANO GYM

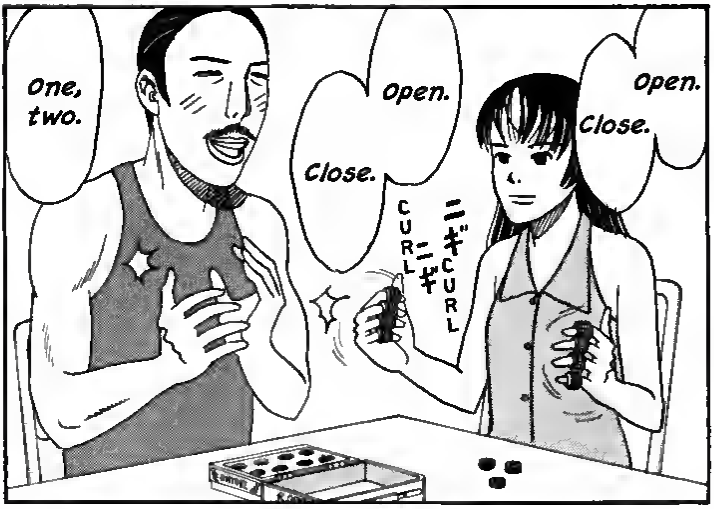

These guys are pianists?!

But what you need now is the strength to take on adults.
Your technique is perfect the way it is, Uta.

This month we're doing 300 grams!

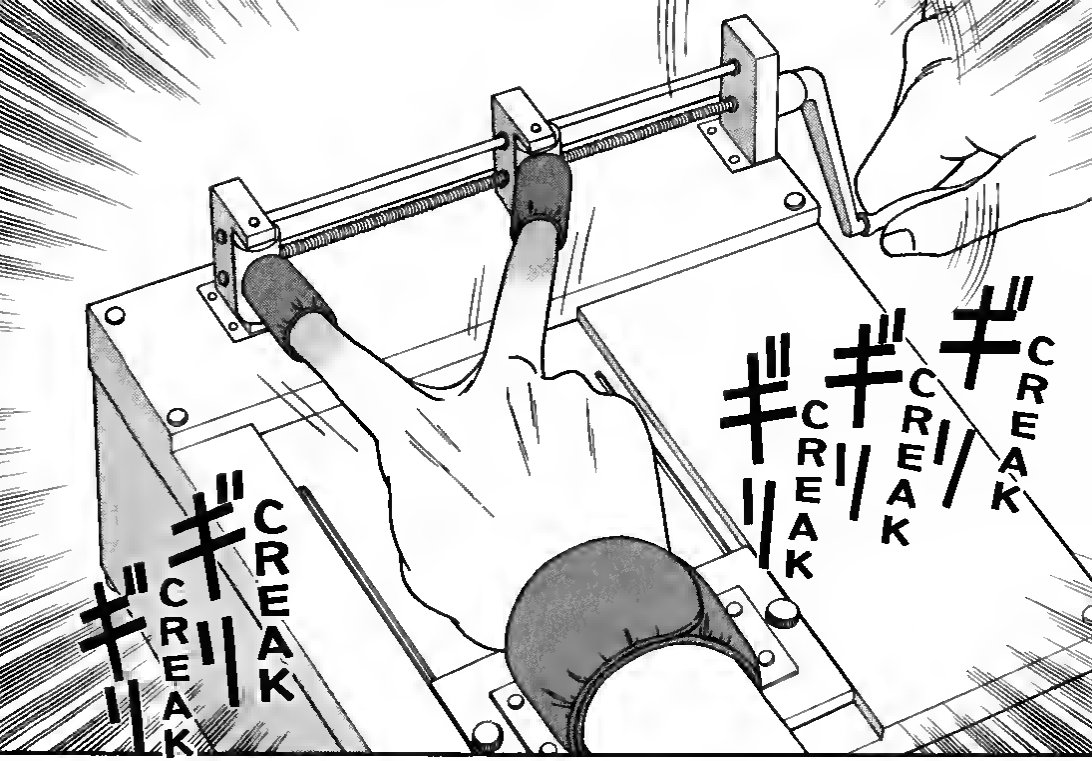

Last month you did 200 grams, right?

Whoa, he's making her do some crazy stuff...

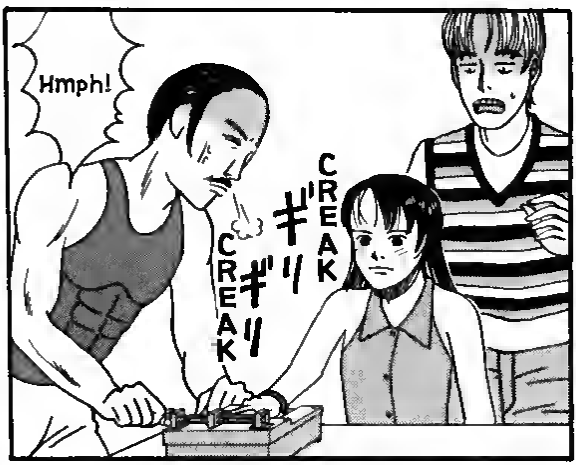

One, two.
Open.
Close.
CURL
ニギニギ
Open.
Close.

Okay.

It'll make your fingers more nimble.
Next is the Otori Gym's Special Stretching Machine.


ギ CREAK
ギ CREAK
ギ CREAK
ギ CREAK
ギ CREAK

No prob.
Y-Y-You okay?!

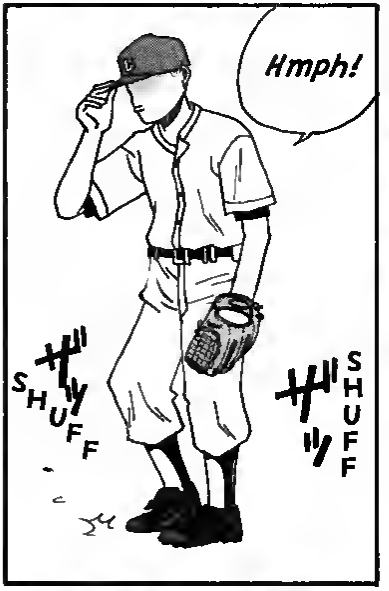

Hmph!
ギ CREAK
ギ CREAK

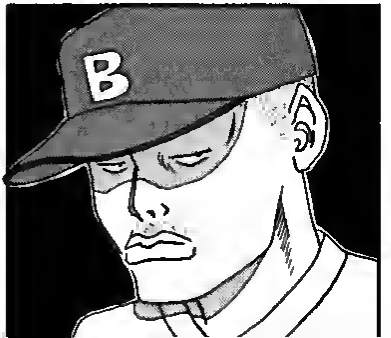
There's no chance we'd damage her fingers.
ふうっ PHEW
The equipment here has all been scientifically designed, so it's all safe.

...for baseball that is.
Mr. Otori is a great teacher...
Oh, Uta! Hee hee!
クスクスクス HEE HEE HEE
Why you-
Right ...
Now you know why my forkball is so awesome.

Let's go. Let's go.
We can do it. We can do it.
...to take care of your fingers...
I told you...
Third base!
カ
KRAK
ン

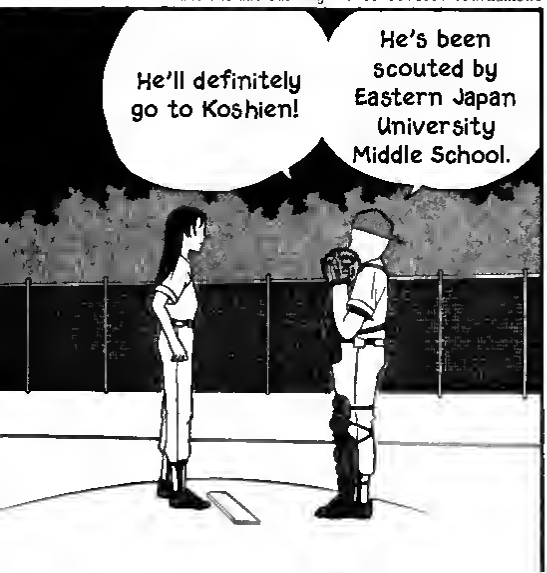
Idiot!
Naga-
tsuda!

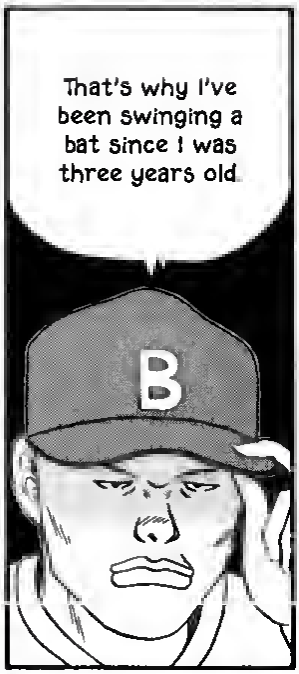

Hmph!
SHUFF
SHUFF



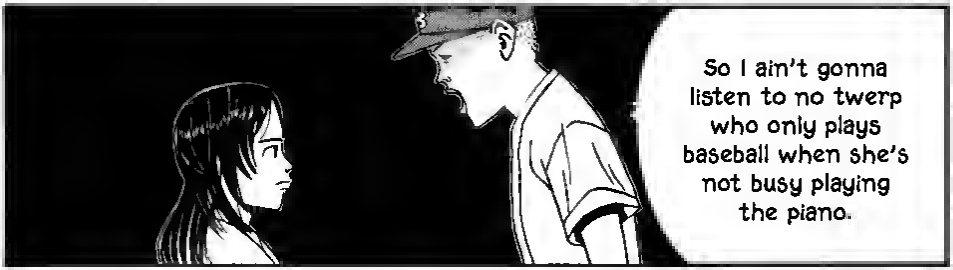
You should've gone after it with both hands, you juggler!

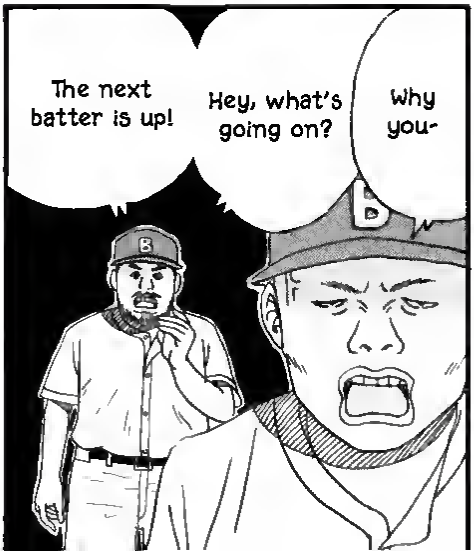
Cultural Note: Koshien is the national high school baseball tournament




That's why I've been swinging a bat since I was three years old.

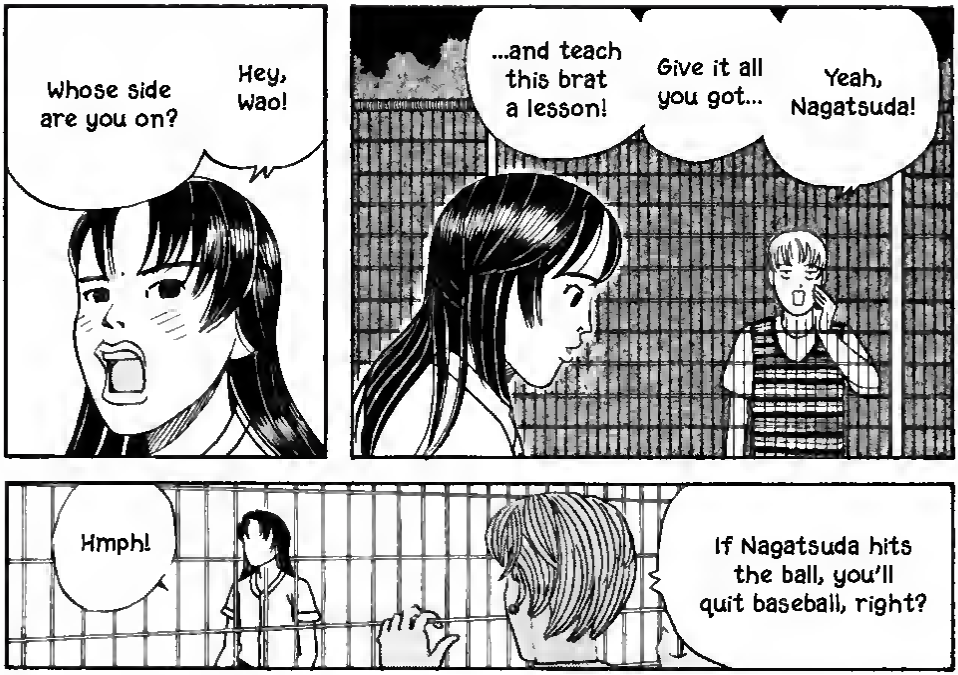
I'm gonna go to the pros!
Eek!

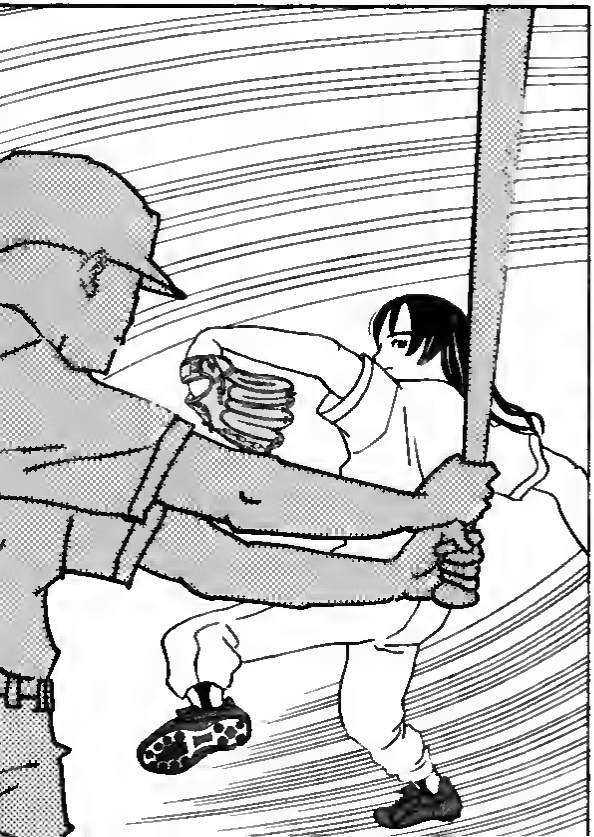

So I ain't gonna listen to no twerp who only plays baseball when she's not busy playing the piano.


The next batter is up!
Hey, what's going on?
Why you-

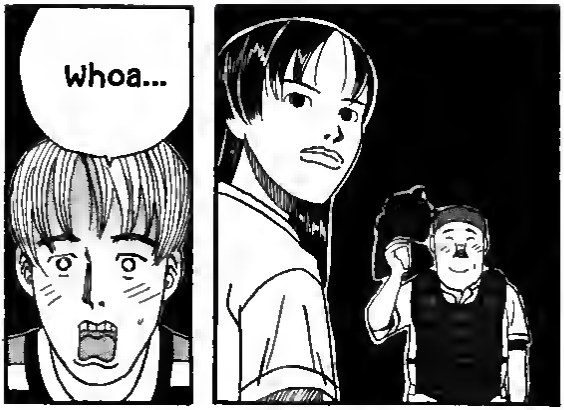
Then say that before you make errors!
Oh yeah?!

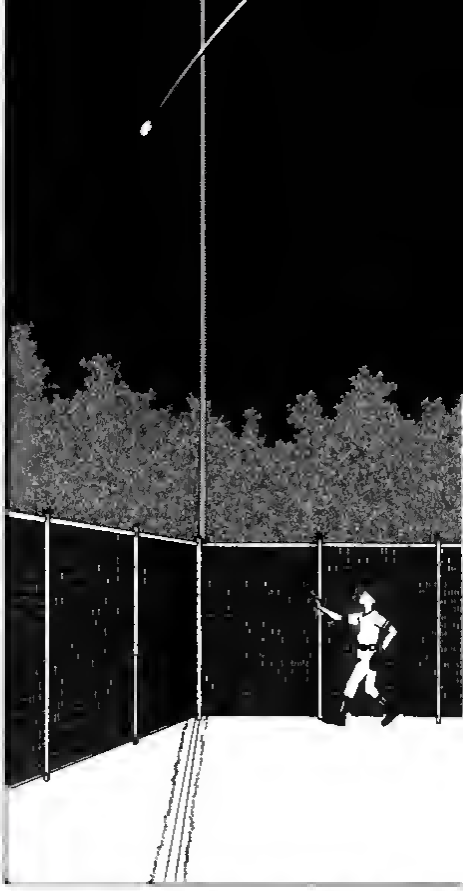
If you shut me out, then you can stay.
Hmph!
But if I win...
...you give up baseball and quit the team.
This'll be a chance for Uta to quit baseball...
This...!
Th-


Hey, Wao!
Whose side are you on?
Yeah, Nagatsuda!
Give it all you got...
...and teach this brat a lesson!
Hmph!
If Nagatsuda hits the ball, you'll quit baseball, right?

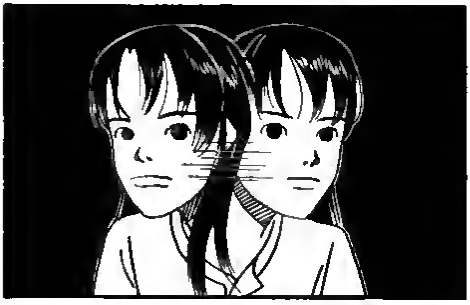


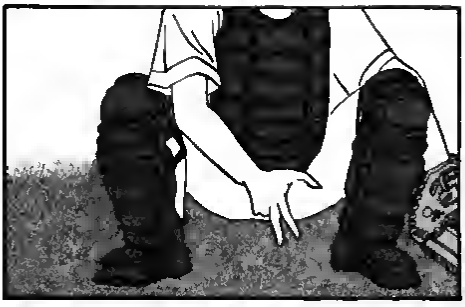
カシャーン
KRASHッ
Tch!
He's gonna hit it for sure.
Uh-oh...
うあ
RAHH
キュワーン
WOOSH

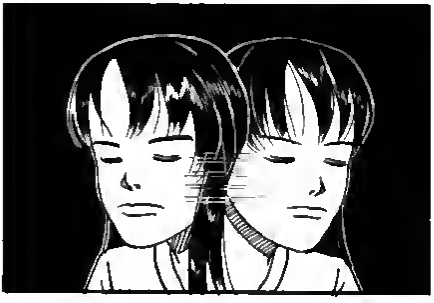

Whoa...



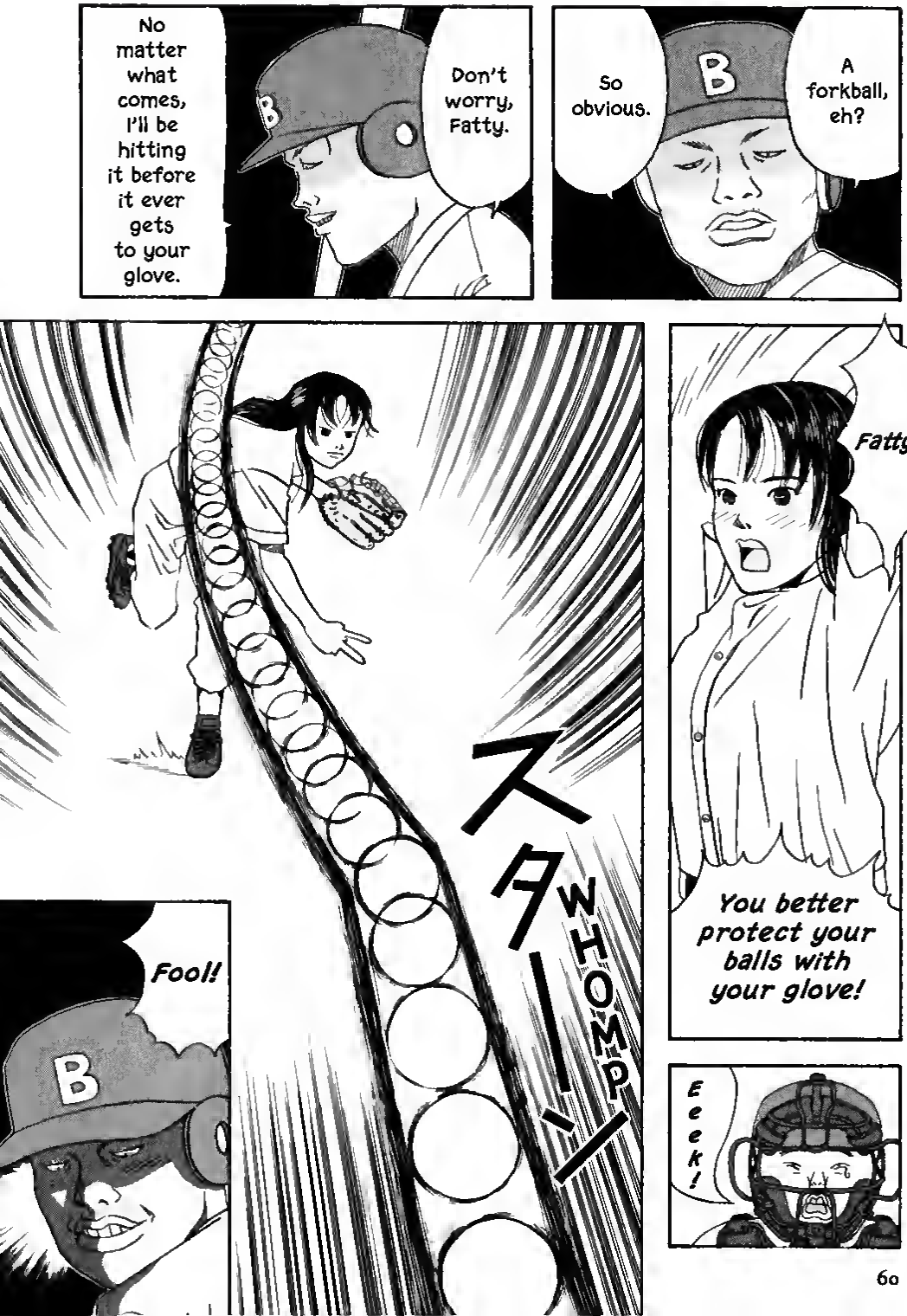
...there's no way I'd miss.
If it's a fastball or a curveball...

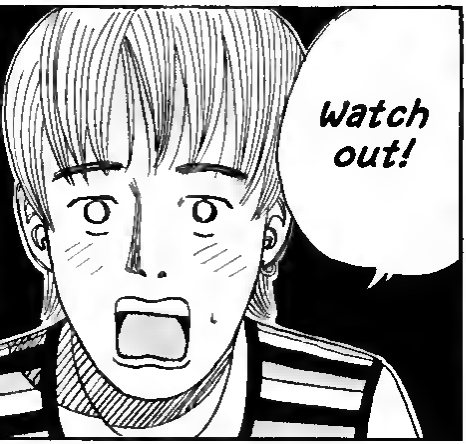






I can't catch no forkball.
Hey now, no way.


No matter what comes, I'll be hitting it before it ever gets to your glove.
Don't worry, Fatty.
So obvious.
A forkball, eh?
Fatty!
You better protect your balls with your glove!
Eeek!
スターン
WHOMP!
Fool!



WHAT WAS THE SOUND IT MADE? IT WAS LIKE UTA WAS HUGGING THE PIANO KEYS...

SHE CAUGHT...
...NAGATSUDA'S BALL.
...Nagatsuda!
This is how you do it...
Eeeek!
Urk!
...to take care of your hand...
I told you...

Chapter 4 The Autumn Sky Song

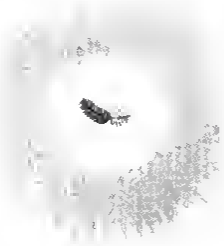
It's so loud.
びくっ
FLINCH

Shut up, old hag! It's not even seven yet.
ガラッ
CLATTER

Quit playing the piano! You suck!
KIKUNA GROCE

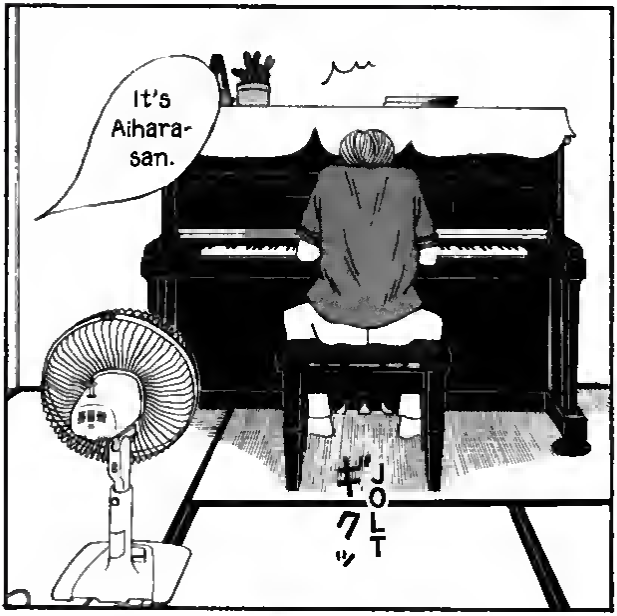
Please be patient until then.
It's only six more months until he fails his music college exam.

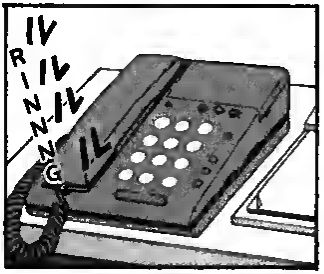
I'm so sorry.
Sorry.
Did he just call me an old hag?!

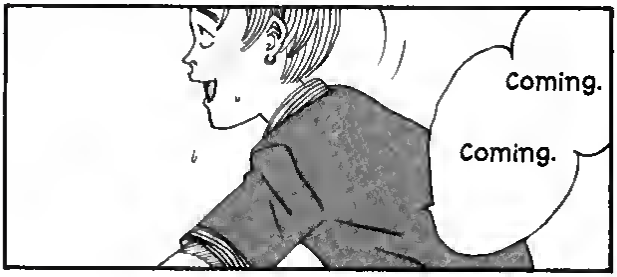


THE MORE I THINK ABOUT THAT SOUND...

...THE FURTHER AWAY IT GETS.

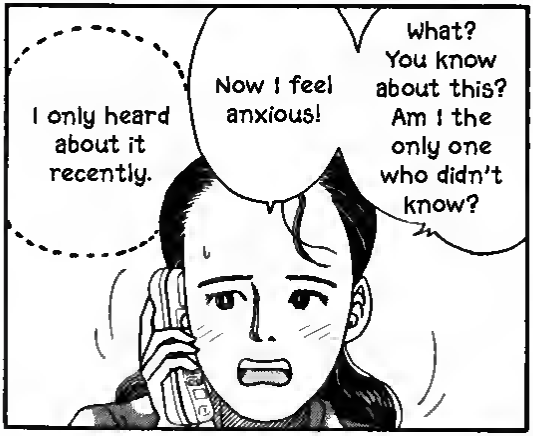






Gym?
Wanna come with me?
I'm going to Hachioji-kun's gym tomorrow.

Kikuna-kun.
Uh, yeah?


I only heard about it recently.
Now I feel anxious!
What? You know about this? Am I the only one who didn't know?

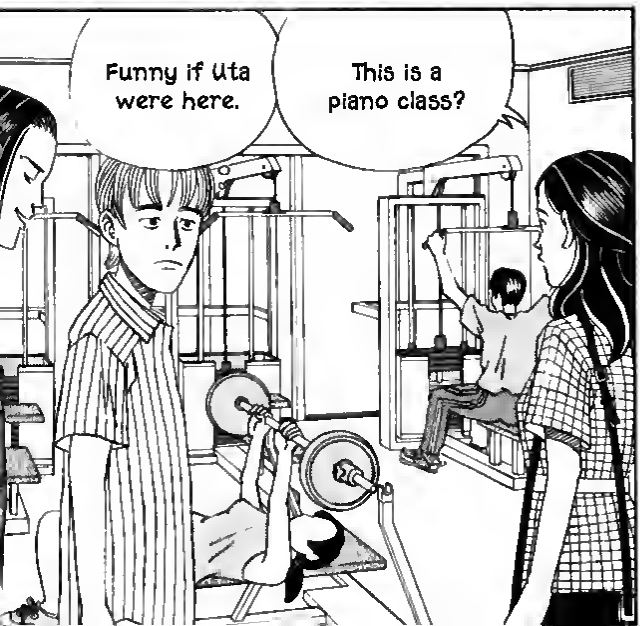
Is it the Otori Gym by any chance?
He says he's strengthening his muscles separately from his piano lessons.

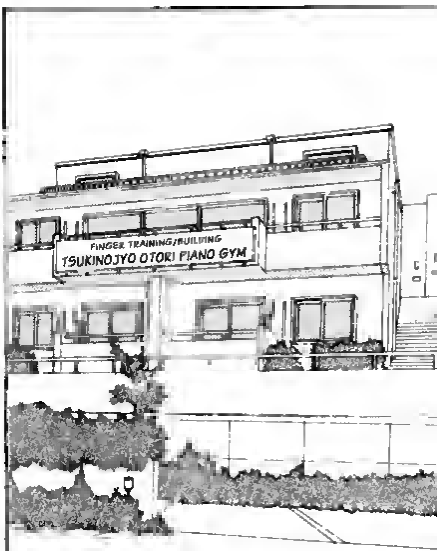
Uh, yeah!
Let's try our best...
...and we'll improve together. Bye!

Meet in front of the station at four? Okay.
I'll go.

THE REASON HE STARTED PLAYING THE PIANO WASN'T WITH PURE INTENTIONS, YOU KNOW.
TOGETHER...
WE'LL IMPROVE TOGETHER.
Shaddup! You only joined a band to pick up chicks too, you know!
And that's when he started taking piano lessons!
...PLAYING THE PIANO IN THE MUSIC ROOM.
IN SIXTH GRADE, HE SAW KOZUE AIHARA...
Without you, Kikuna, this band wouldn't have happened.
Well, you do have a good ear.
Well, it's kinda amazing that you're actually applying to music college.

We'll be going our separate ways in college...
...but let's play again someday.


This is a piano class?
Funny if Uta were here.

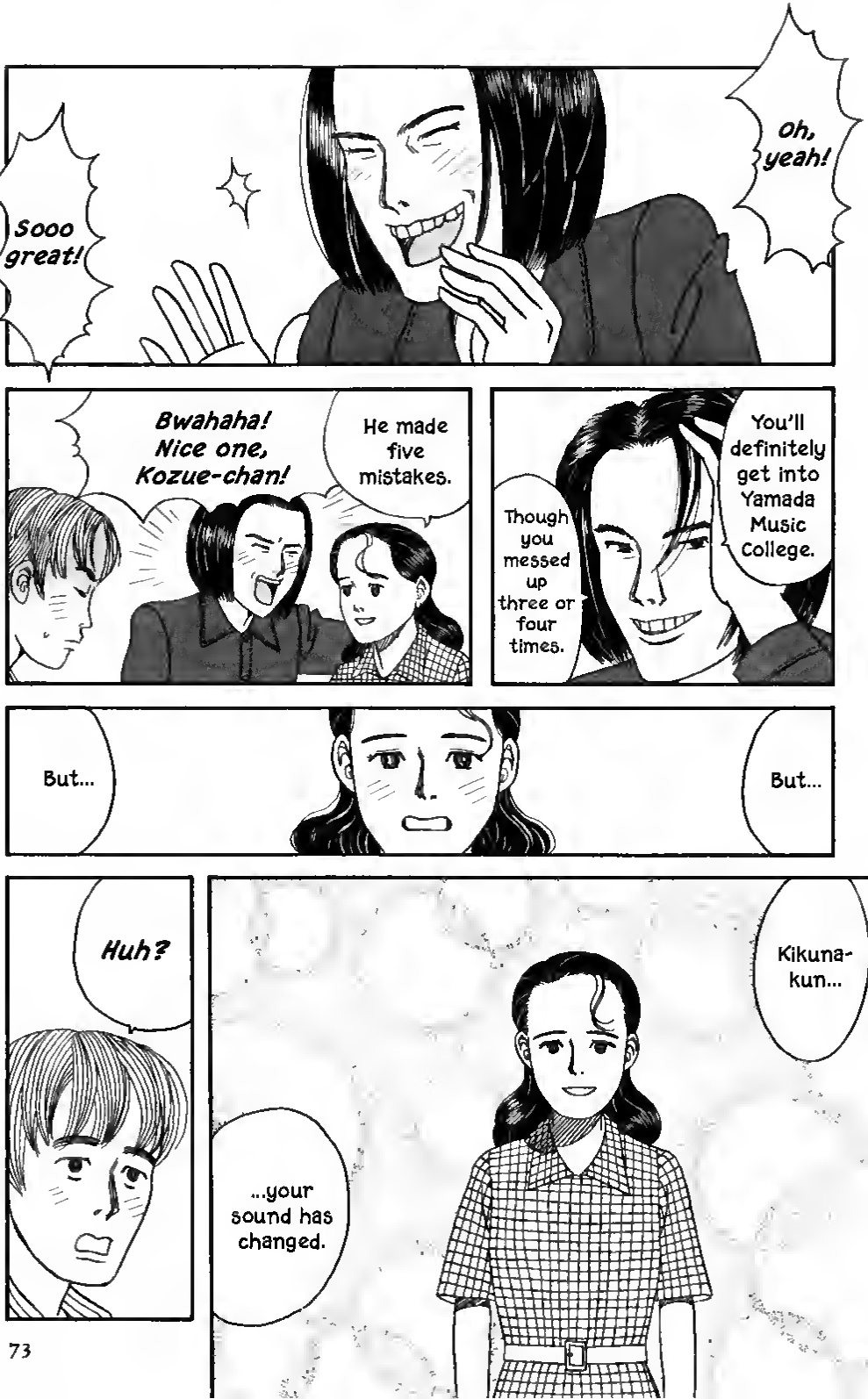

FINGER TRAINING/BUILDING
TSUKINOJYO OTOKI PIANO GYM

PIANO ROOM
AIHARA IS SUCH A SERIOUS PIANO PLAYER, SUCH A MODEL STUDENT...
JUST LIKE AIHARA HERSELF...
IT'S SO PURE
It's never too late to start.
In your case, you need to build up your upper arm muscles.
RUBRUB
Superb...

...MOVE ROUND AND ROUND...
HIS FINGERS...
...ISN'T INVITING. IT'S A METALLIC SOUND.
HACHIOJI'S SOUND...
DA DUNNN
AND IT'S SO FORTISSIMO.

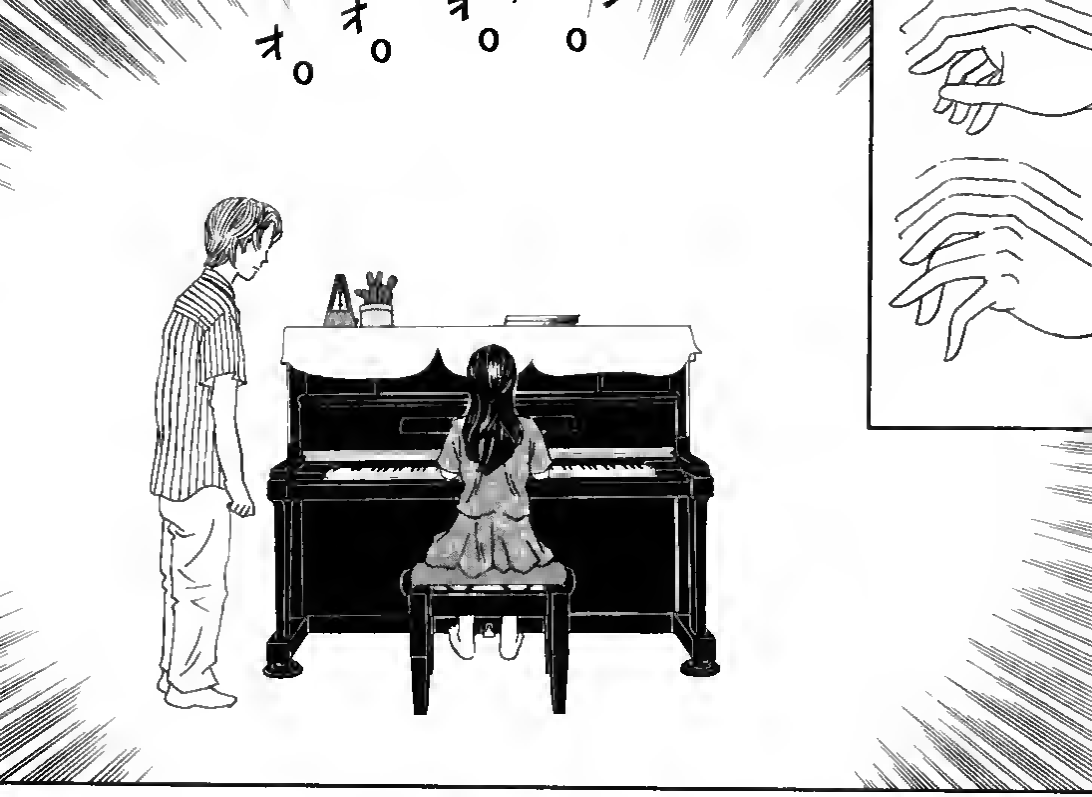
...but I put a lot of effort into it.
I know people have called me a prodigy...
No doubt because of the six years you've trained at the Otori Gym.
Bravo! It's perfect!
He's just loud, that's all.
MUMBLE
He's the ultimate fortissimo.
Ha ha ha.
Hachioji-chan's snapped the piano strings three times already.
Show me your perfect technique that isn't just a lot of noise.
Then show me what you got!
Oh yeah?!

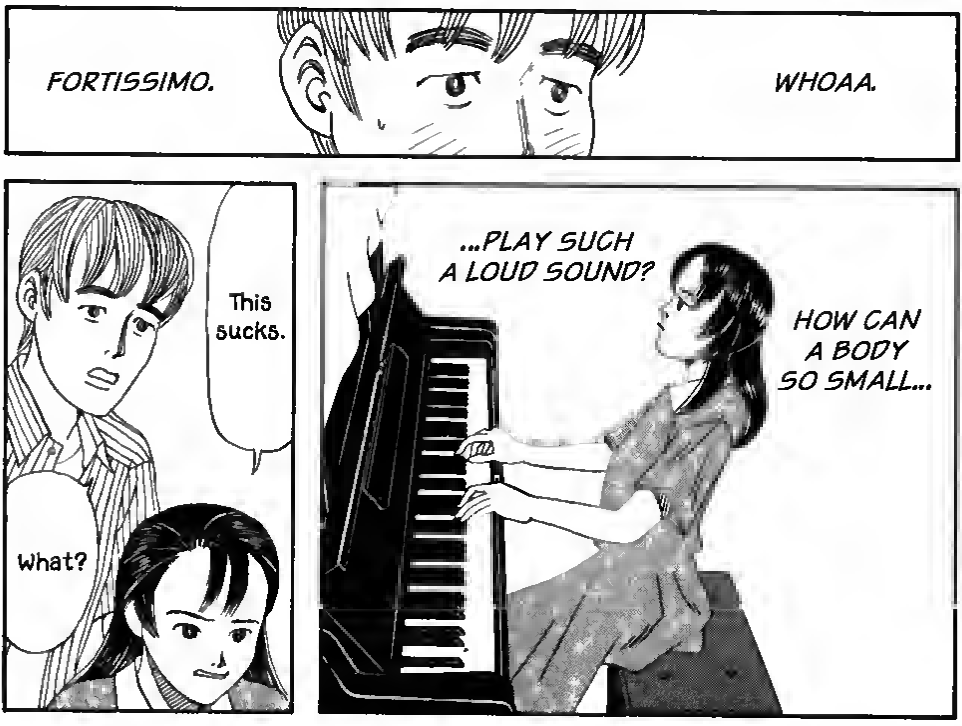
AH, I MISSED.
CRAP, I MISSED AGAIN.
MY PLAYING IS DONE FOR.
BEING COMPARED TO HACHIOJI'S PLAYING IN FRONT OF KOZUE AIHARA...

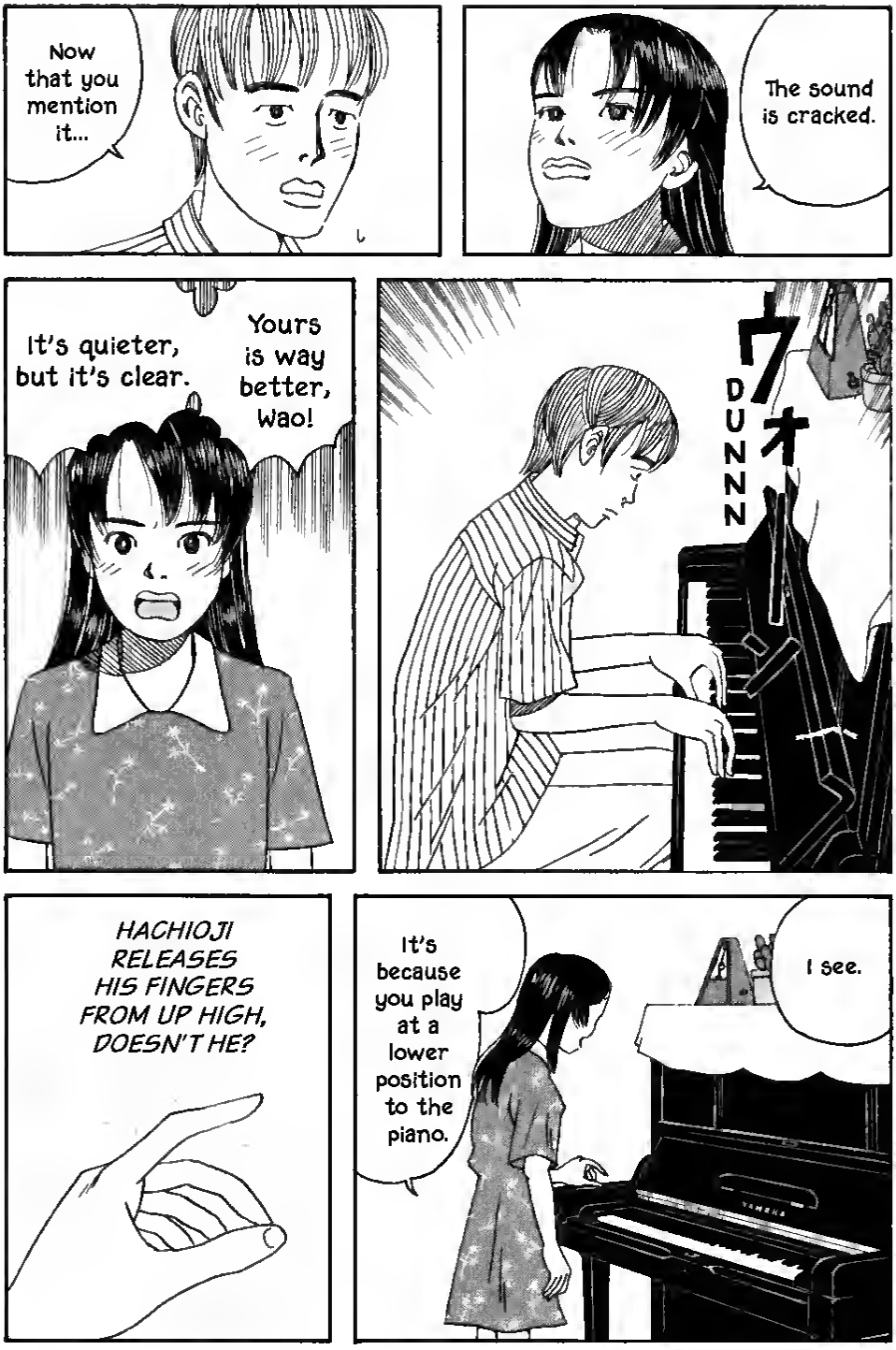

Sooo great!
Oh, yeah!
Bwahaha! Nice one, Kozue-chan!
He made five mistakes.
Though you messed up three or four times.
You'll definitely get into Yamada Music College.
But...
But...
Huh?
...your sound has changed.
Kikuna-kun...

Y-
I'm so moved by that.
Heh!
You make a weird sound because your fingers are all stiff.
YESSSSS!
Wao.

Ack!
You!
Ha ha ha!
Arghh! You were listening?
You really suck at the piano, don't you?
It was a good sound.
But...
...for your sound, Uta.
I'm aiming...
KIKUNA GROCER
...your sound again?
Can you please play me...
Hey.
Teacher!

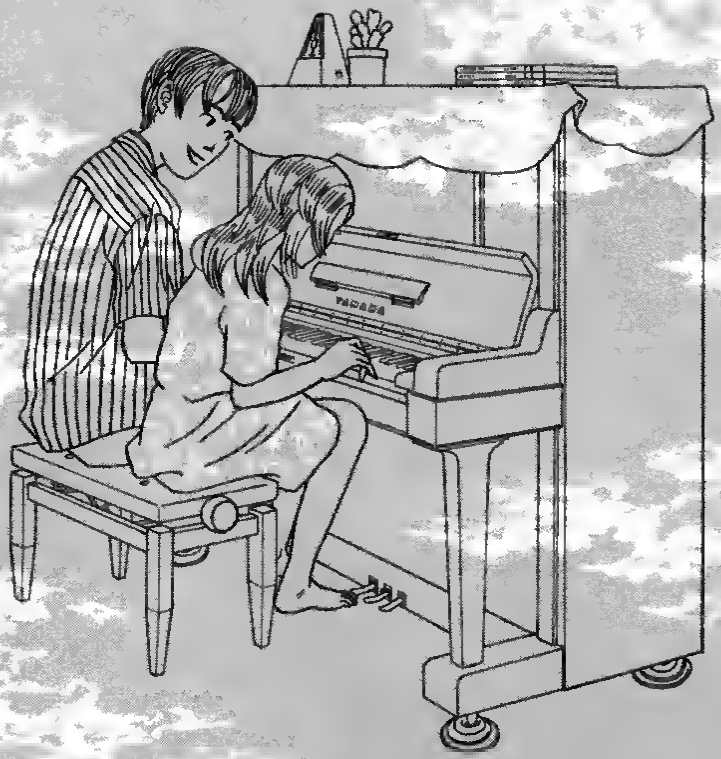



FORTISSIMO.
WHOAA.
This sucks.
What?
...PLAY SUCH A LOUD SOUND?
HOW CAN A BODY SO SMALL...


Now that you mention it...
The sound is cracked.
It's quieter, but it's clear.
Yours is way better, Wao!
ウォ
DUNNN
HACHIOJI RELEASES HIS FINGERS FROM UP HIGH, DOESN'T HE?
It's because you play at a lower position to the piano.
I see.

Shut up that piano!
What's going on?
ゴオオオ

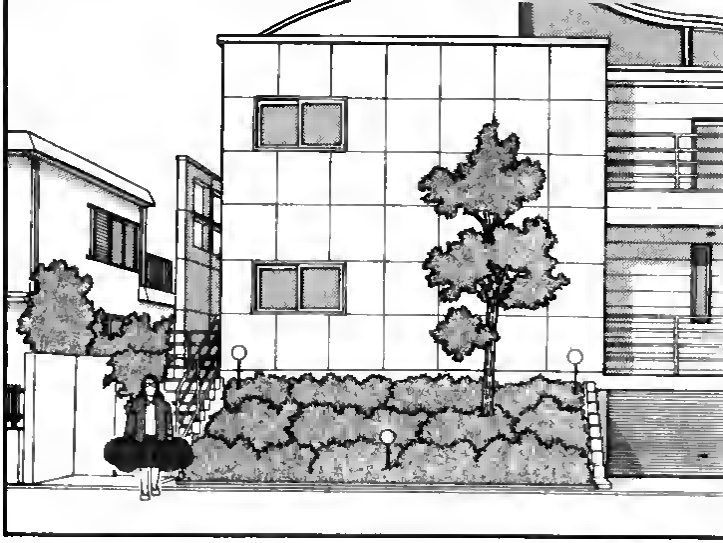
Wao!
...is for your troubles.
This...
Sorry.
What is going on?!
I guess we'll let it slide...
Well if you insist.
Please let them play a little longer.
Dear...

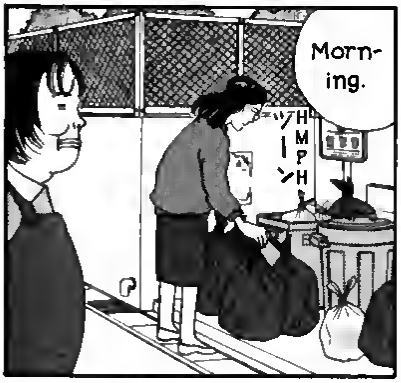


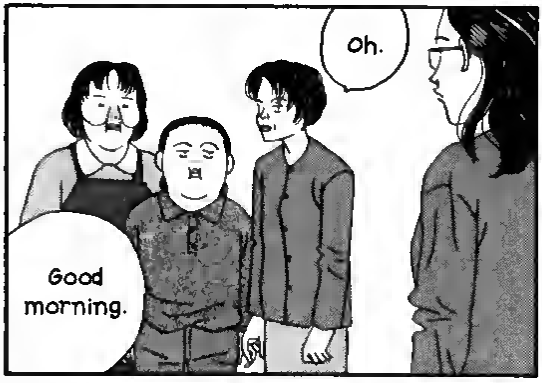
Chapter 4: The Autumn Sky Song • the end

Chapter 5 The Mother Song

RUSTLE
RUSTLE



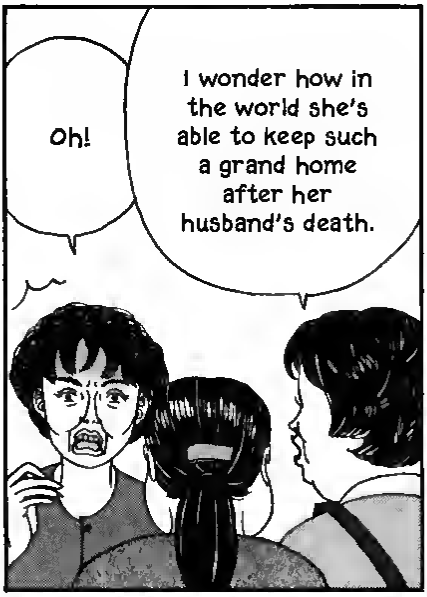

Morn-ing.
HMPH

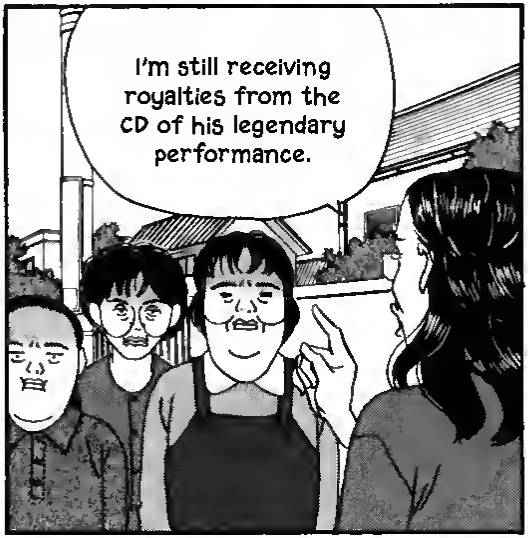

Oh.
Good morning.

Koichiro Naruse's?
She was just riding her father's coattails.

And she was hyped as a child prodigy at one point too.
...about Mrs. Naruse's daughter these days.
We never hear anything ...

No need to worry about me!
Koichiro left me enough money in his will.
EEK!

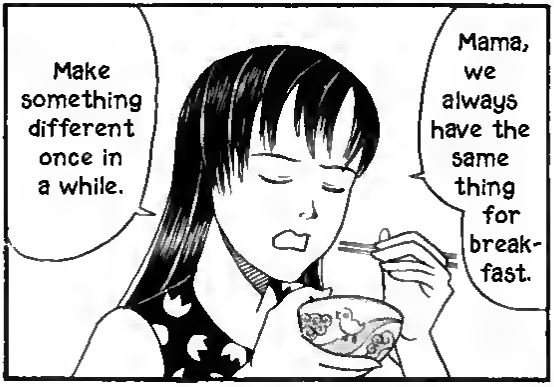

Oh!
I wonder how in the world she's able to keep such a grand home after her husband's death.


I'm still receiving royalties from the CD of his legendary performance.

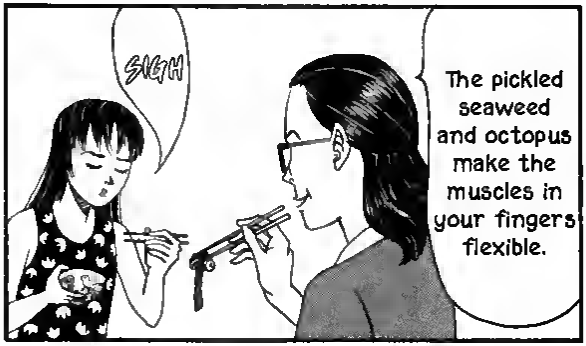
AFTER WINNING THE BESANCON INTERNATIONAL MUSIC FESTIVAL, ALL THE TOP-NOTCH ORCHESTRAS WERE CLAMORING FOR KOICHIRO TO BE THEIR CONDUCTOR...

How envious.

Use your left hand to hold the chopsticks today.
Uta.


Make something different once in a while.
Mama, we always have the same thing for breakfast.

...use either hand.
You have to be able to...


SIGH
The pickled seaweed and octopus make the muscles in your fingers flexible.

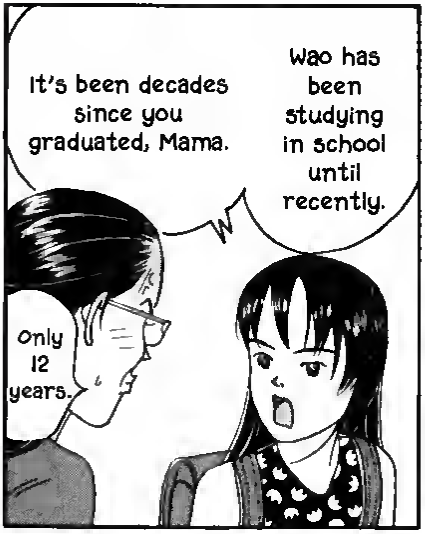
...and your hands bigger.
Sardines makes your bones strong...

I got it already!
Don't take them off at school either!
They'll protect your precious hands.
Don't forget your gloves.
...I'm keeping these on in this weather.
There's no way...
Geez.
Let's make money!
Now!
How lovely.
Oh.
I've been invited to the home of the NHK Symphony Orchestra's concert master...
Are you going out?
Oh.

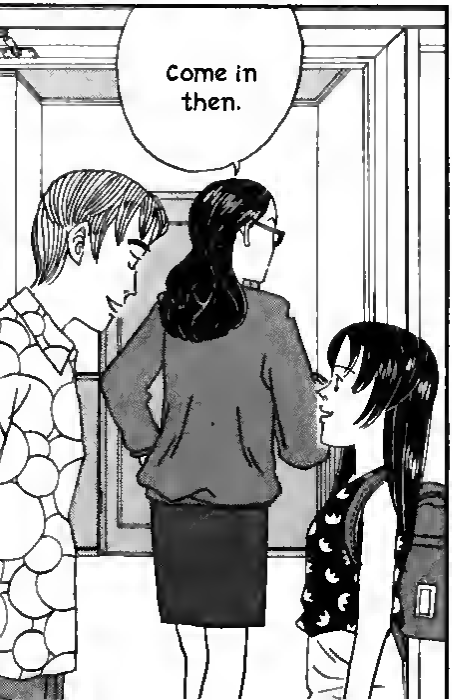
ゴオオオ..
RMMM
ブオ
VRMM
オオ
ブオオ
VROOM
C'mon. Just come here.
Whaddaya want?

I told you to come straight home!
No need to be rude!
ドワッ BOOM
This guy again?!
Most of the homework you did for me was wrong.
Well, you see...
What?!
So Wao is going to do my homework in exchange for me teaching him the piano.

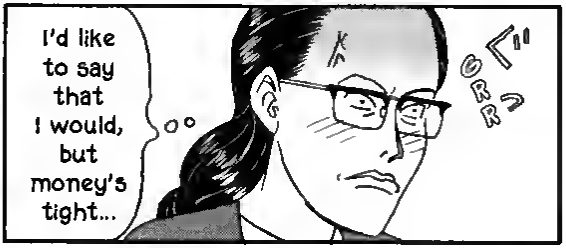
If I can listen to her every day and play her piano here...
It's amazing ...!

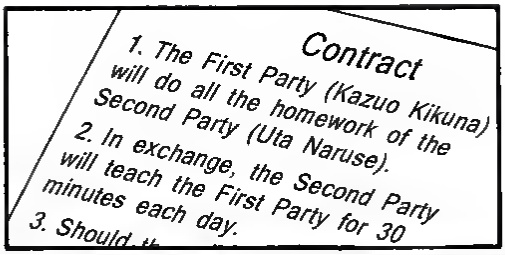

It's been decades since you graduated, Mama.
Wao has been studying in school until recently.
Only 12 years.

That's not it.
That this bleached-hair punk is smarter than me?!
So what are you saying?
"Bleached-hair punk"?


Come in then.

Then, will you pay for another tutor for me?

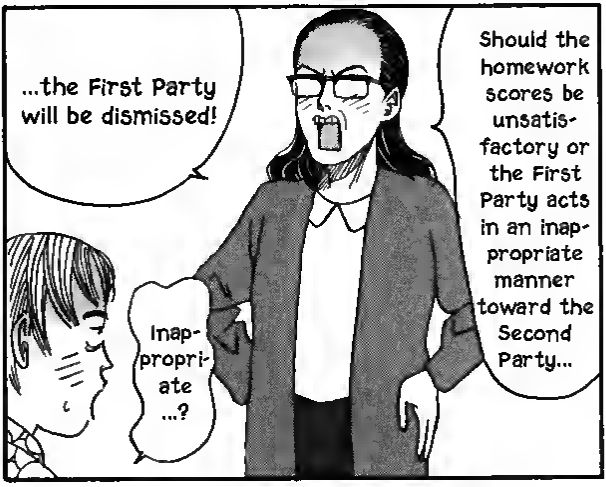

I'd like to say that I would, but money's tight...


Contract
1. The First Party (Kazuo Kikuna) will do all the homework of the Second Party (Uta Naruse).
2. In exchange, the Second Party will teach the First Party for 30 minutes each day.
3. Should

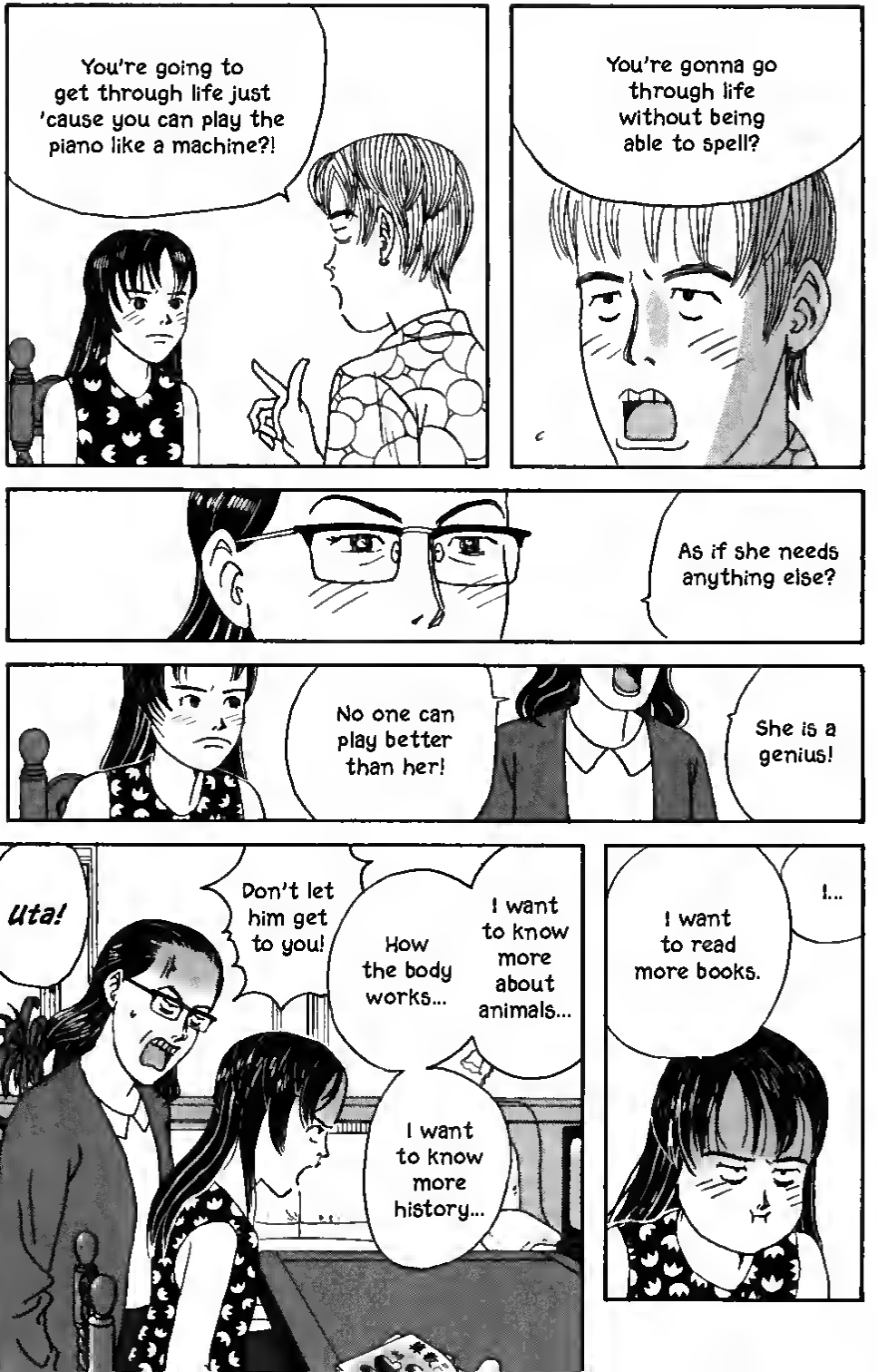
What?!
You're not some pedophile, are you?

In exchange, the Second Party will teach the First Party for 30 minutes each day...
The First Party (Kazuo Kikuna) will do all the homework of the Second Party (Uta Naruse).

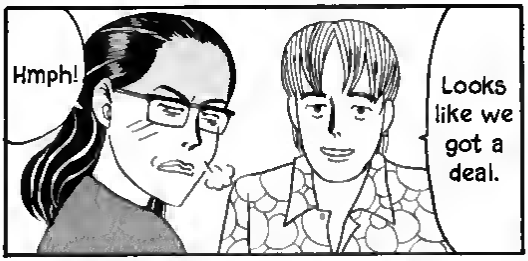
Sign it!


...the First Party will be dismissed!
Inappropriate ...?
Should the homework scores be unsatisfactory or the First Party acts in an inappropriate manner toward the Second Party...

I refuse!
You guys are a piece of work, the both of you!
Let me see your notebook.
JAPANESE NOTEBOOK
I'm willing to help Uta do her own homework.
But there's no way...
...I'm doing it for her!
Japanese Mini-Quiz September
15
20
……


You're going to get through life just 'cause you can play the piano like a machine?!
You're gonna go through life without being able to spell?
As if she needs anything else?
No one can play better than her!
She is a genius!
Uta!
Don't let him get to you!
How the body works...
I want to know more about animals...
I want to know more history...
I want to read more books.
!...

Help me, Wao.
I'll do my homework myself.

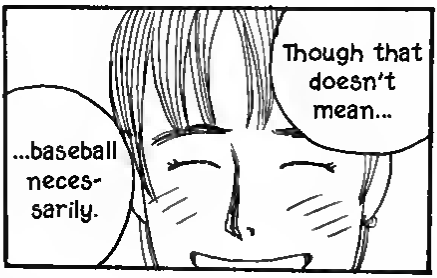

Hmph!
Looks like we got a deal.

GRIT

Base...
...ball?

I think with Uta's talent she should try other things, not just the piano.

You aren't playing again, are you?!
You aren't...

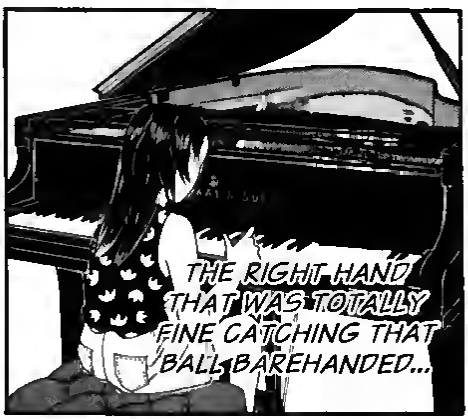

Though that doesn't mean...
...baseball necessarily.

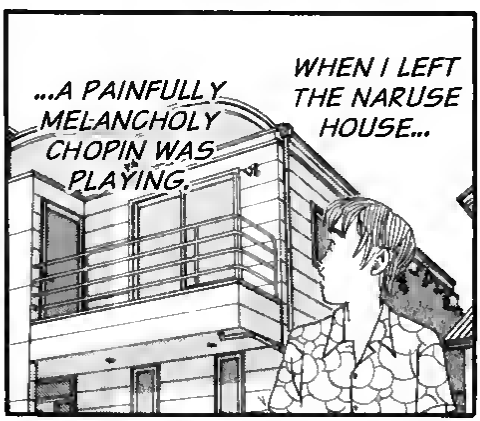
Mama, what are you doing?!
I thought I threw your glove and bat away!
Sorry, Uta.
Mama...
You're always...
...telling me what to do!
You're hiding them, aren't you?
Don't touch my stuff!
Stop it!
I've had it!
Uta!
Get out of my way!

IT-WAS THE SOUND OF UTA REFUSING TO BE CONTROLLED BY HER MOTHER.
A SOUND THAT WAS FILLED WITH SORROW.

.....
...you've ever hit me... your own mother!
That's the first time...
うわあっ
WAHHH
I've only been thinking of you!
I'm sorry.
I won't do it again...

Is it okay?
Your hand!

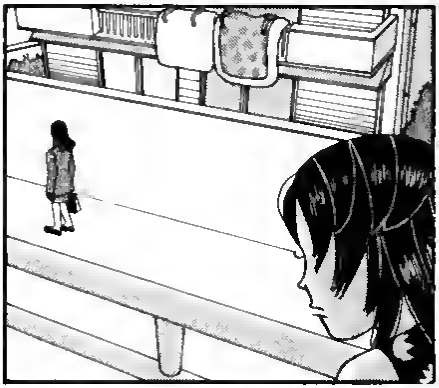

THE RIGHT HAND THAT WAS TOTALLY FINE CATCHING THAT BALL BAREHANDED...

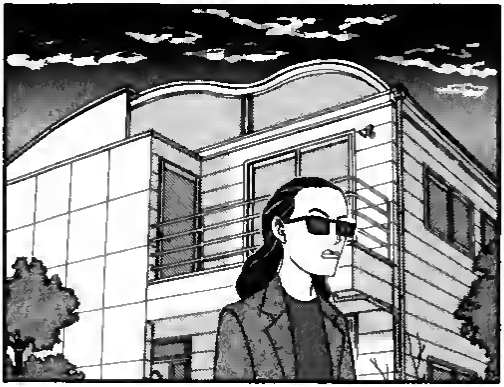

...A PAINFULLY MELANCHOLY CHOPIN WAS PLAYING.
WHEN I LEFT THE NARUSE HOUSE...

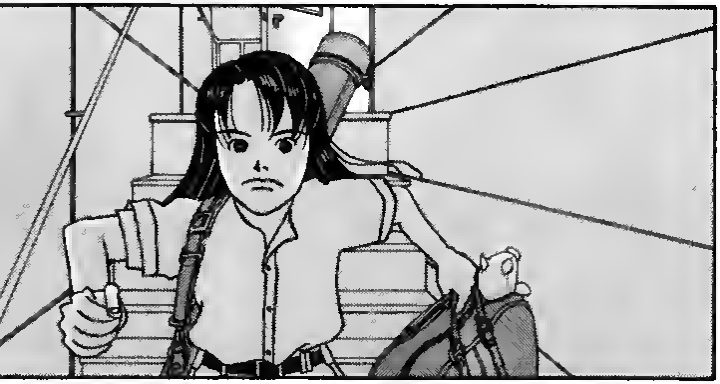
...WAS SWOLLEN RED.
TODAY...

Okay...

All right, I'm going out so you be sure to keep practicing...





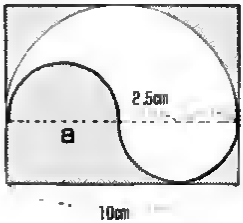


SNACK
響
HIBIKI
響
Welcome...

Chapter 6 The Heart Song

Find the area of "a."

Huh?



First, let's figure out the area of the rectangle.

もぞ FIDGET

もぞ FIDGET

もぞ FIDGET

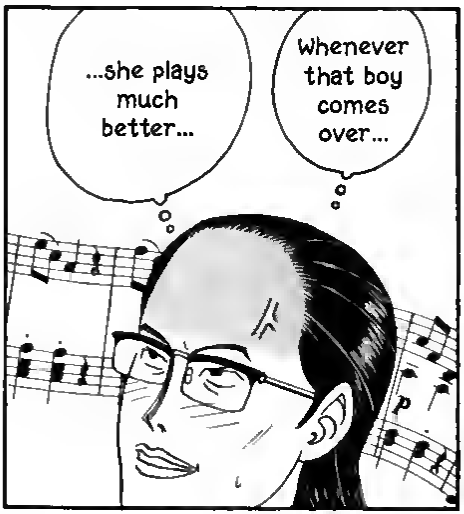
Oh, geez. (Well, with this kind of parent...)

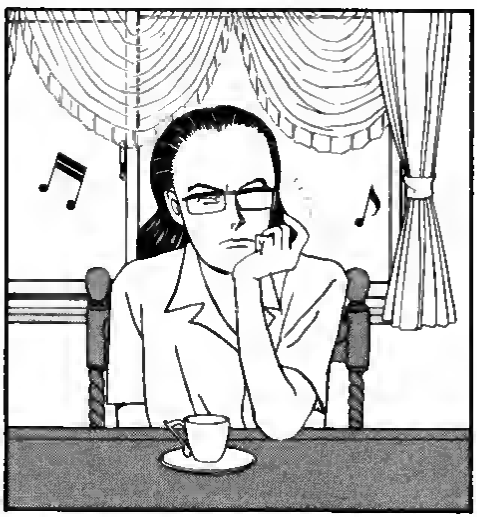
She's never sat down to study anything outside of a classroom.

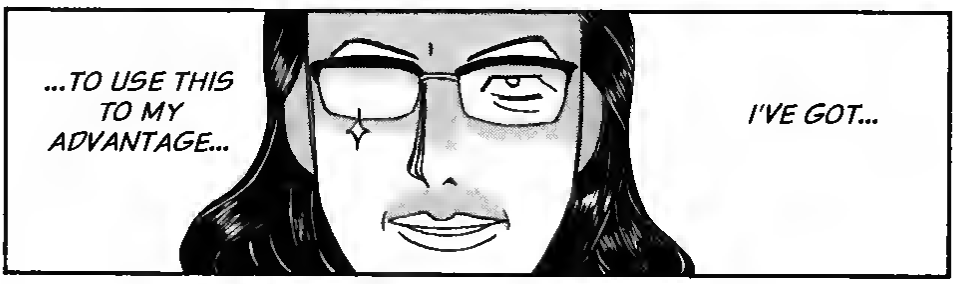
You don't seem like you're in the mood to study at all today!

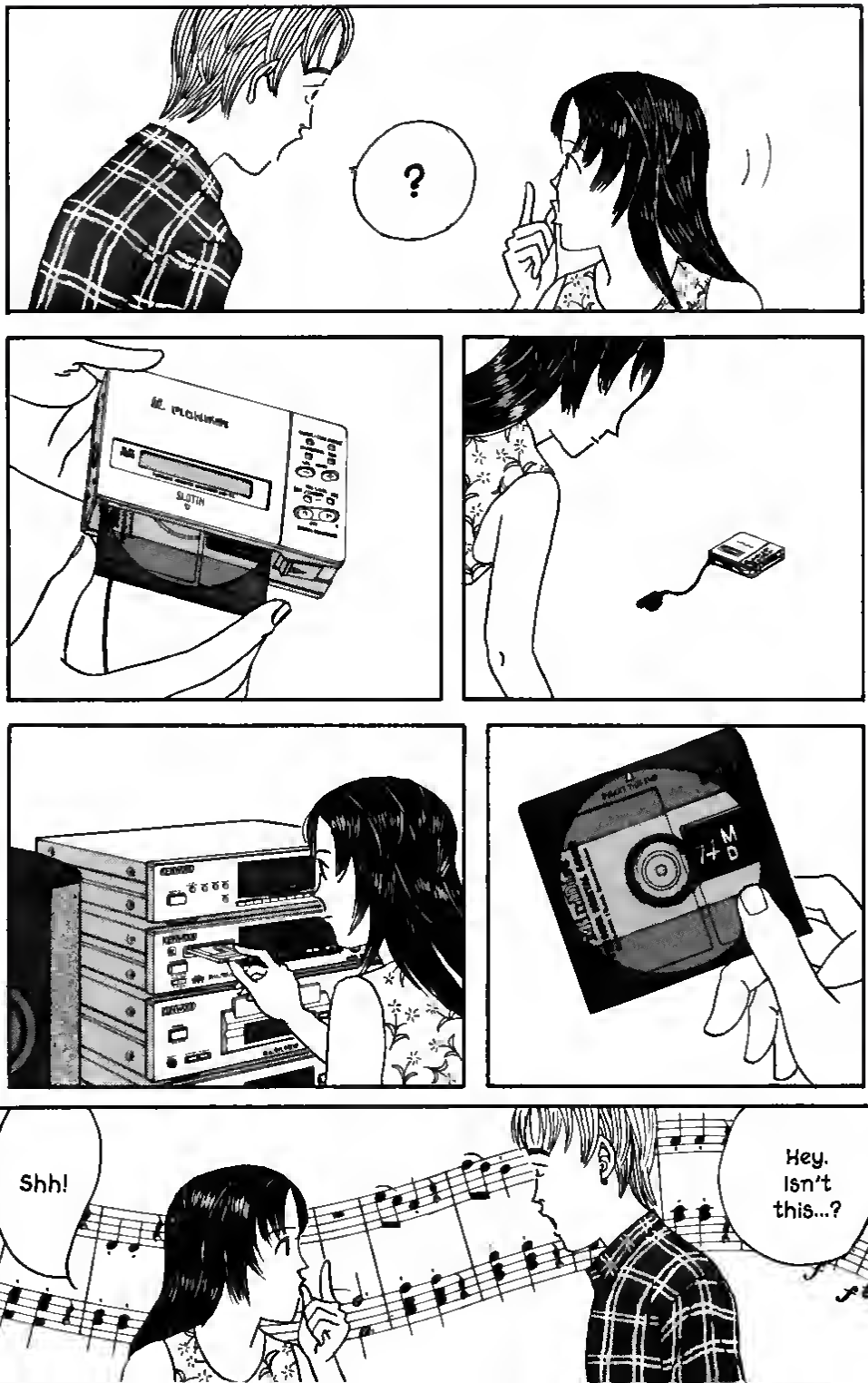
What do you mean, "huh"?

Hey, that's not what we agreed to.
Okay!
Go practice the piano.
That's enough, Uta.
Yes, that's why she needs to practice harder.
The YMC... That age-restricted competition?
She's going to be in the YMC competition next week.
Huh?
I only agreed to do the YMC to get on Mama's good side.
That's not what I meant...
Don't worry, Wao. I'll still do your lesson.

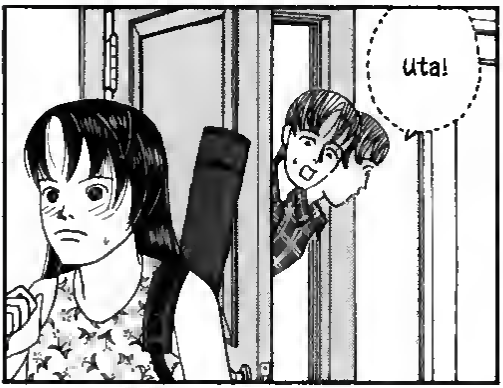

...she plays much better...
Whenever that boy comes over...



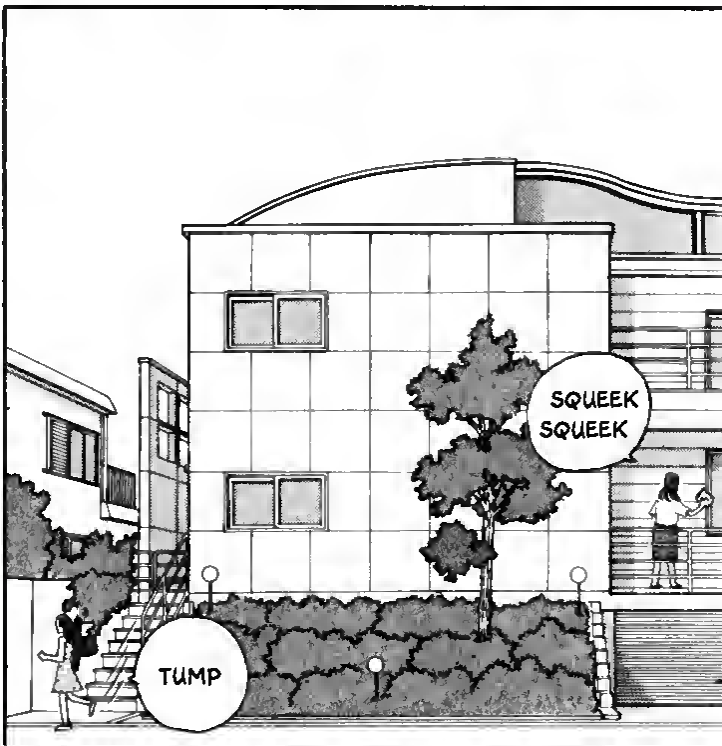

...TO USE THIS TO MY ADVANTAGE...
I'VE GOT...


?
Shh!
Hey. Isn't this...?

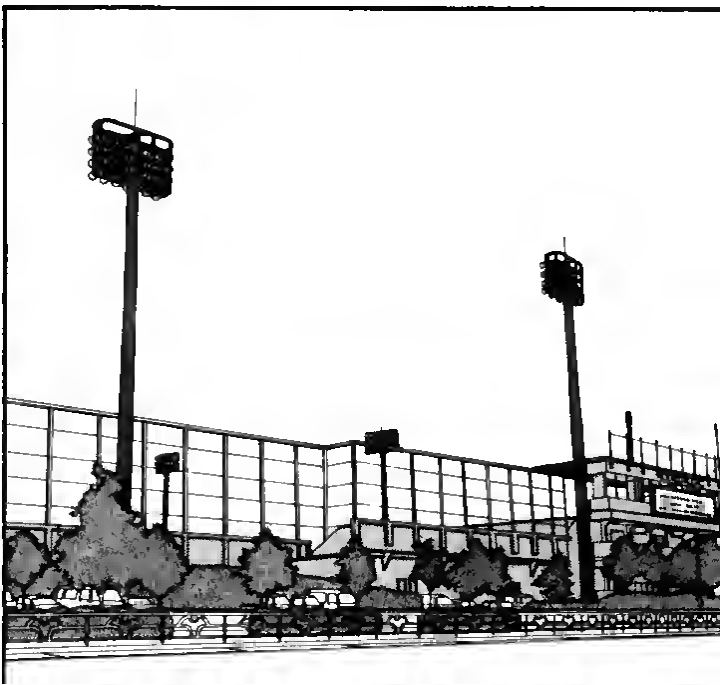
What?!
There's an important game today.
You see...


Uta!

Hey...
Buy me some time.


SQUEEK SQUEEK
TUMP

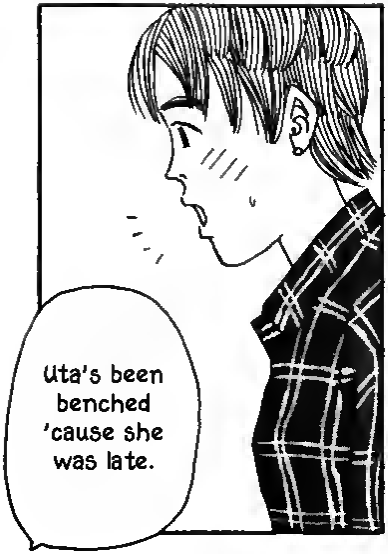
Well!
Looks like she's finally into it.
Oh.
All done?
Yeah ...
.....
...so she wants to be left alone...
She wants to concentrate on practicing for the competition...

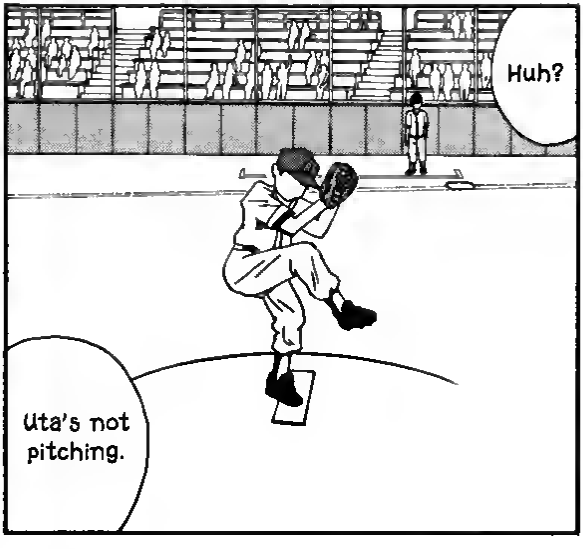


Yo!
Let's go, team! Yeah!
We're gonna go to the Nationals!
As long as we do what we've done in practice, there's no way we'll lose!
There's no way I'm gonna let someone start...
...who shows up late to an important game!
BIG BEARS
.....

Ah.
... There they are. ...
10TH ANNUAL DIAMOND TOURNAMENT
WEST TOKYO REGIONAL FINALS
SPONSORED BY JAPANESE JUNIOR BASEBALL ASSOCIATION

IN
B
B
O
E
R
IN
D
Ohh.
Looks like they're winning
TN 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 R
BEARS 3 1 0 0 2 1 7
DONKEYS 0 0 1 0 1 2


Uta's been benched 'cause she was late.


Huh?
Uta's not pitching.

You're pissed.
Shut up, Fatty!
BAM
パン
All these people yapping behind my back...
...uta.
You're just playing the victim...
...say it to my face!
If you've got something to say...
WHOMP
スパーン

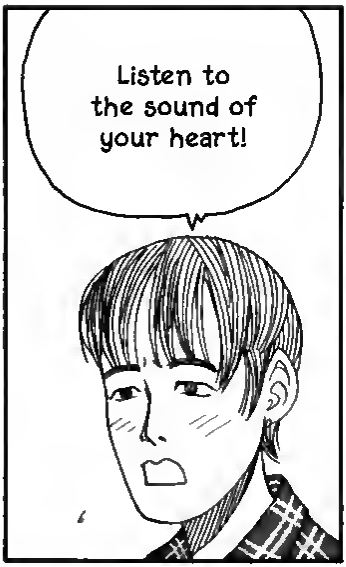
I could believe it with *your* ears, Uta...
Whoa, no way.
I can even hear what they're saying in the other team's dugout.
Playing the victim?
The party what...?
That's like the "Party Effect."
People can focus their hearing on certain things.
...YOU CAN HEAR PEOPLE BADMOUTHING YOU.
EVEN IN NOISY PLACES LIKE AT A PARTY...
The Party Effect, eh?
I see...

Just listen to the voice inside.
Ignore the outfield chatter.
Okay!
I'm putting you in, the final inning.
Naruse!
Get her mad so they eject her!
Hey looky, that girl's coming out!
I wonder if I can...
Hearing the other dugout, huh...

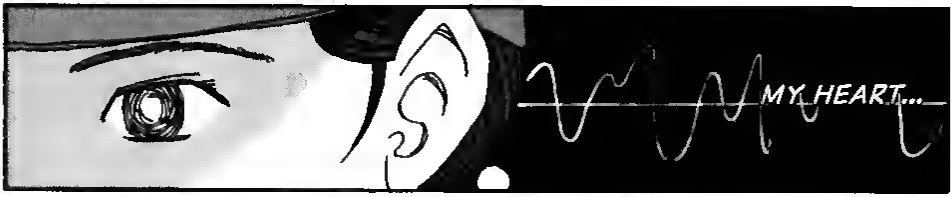
I heard it!
Yes, sir.
Bunt on the first pitch to check her out.
Don
onkey
にまーっ
GRIN
You heard it, right?
Uta.
ヒシュッ
WOOSH
だっ
DASH

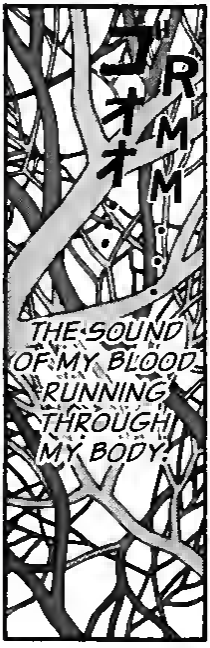
Got it!
コツン
TINK
WRRR
YEAH!!
BIG BEARS
3

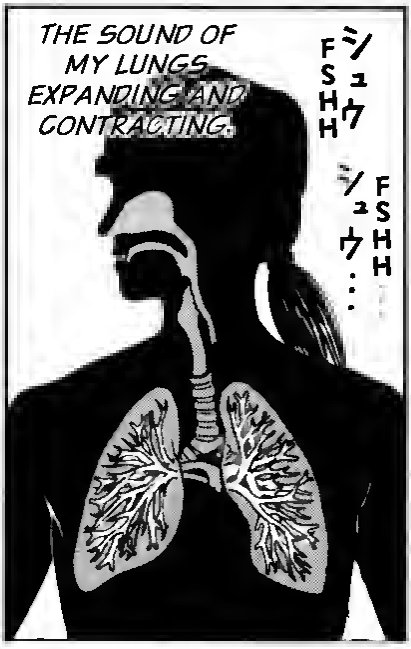
The other pitcher was better.
Ball four!
Aim for her boobs!
Uta?
What's wrong?
The shortstop made an error.
Did he mess up on purpose?
TRAH
We can't lose to someone who only plays baseball when she's not busy playing the piano!


Listen to the sound of your heart!

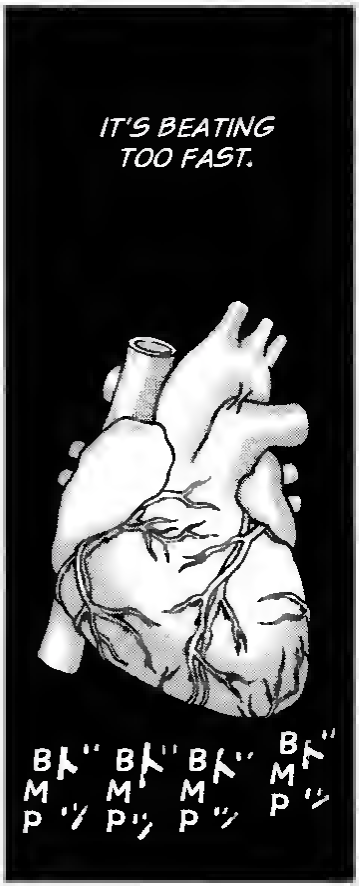
Remember your own rhythm.
Uta, don't let the outside noise sway you.


MY HEART...

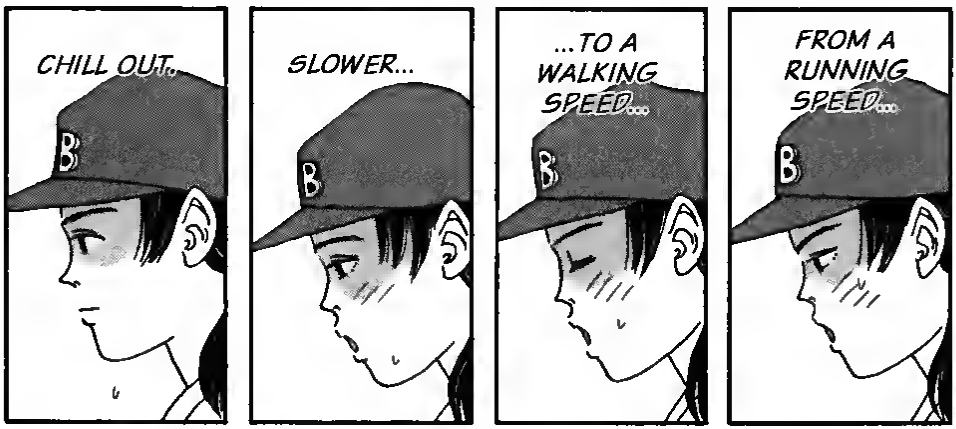

ゴオオ
RMMM
THE SOUND OF MY BLOOD RUNNING THROUGH MY BODY.


THE SOUND OF MY LUNGS EXPANDING AND CONTRACTING.
シュウ
FSHH
シュウ…
FSHH

ハア
HUFF
ハア…
HUFF…
B
THIS IS THE SOUND OF MY BREATHING.


IT'S BEATING TOO FAST.
BMP

AND... THERE! THE SOUND OF MY HEART...!
BMP


CHILL OUT...
SLOWER...
...TO A WALKING SPEED...
FROM A RUNNING SPEED...

B
1
Strike three! You're out!

Chapter 7 The Mischievous Angel Song

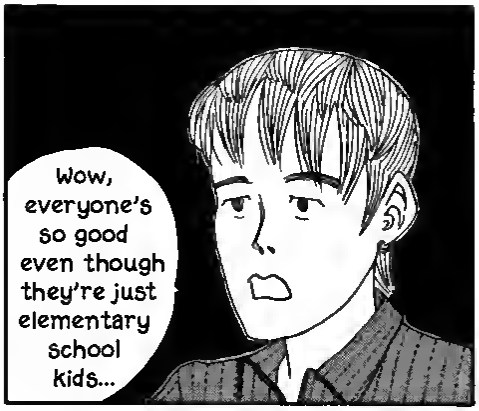
I like baseball.
No way. I'm gonna play baseball.
Yikes...
パーン SMACK
パーン SMACK
パーン SMACK
owww!

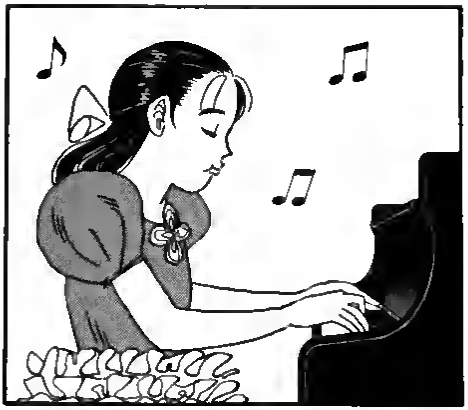
Put your hands down! You'll hurt them!
No, I don't wanna be in no competition!
We'll lose!
It'll hurt the team if I don't play in the finals!
Don't be stupid! You've got the competition!
Oww!
SMACK
SMACK
Argghhh!
SLAM
Play your competition song a hundred times. Got it?

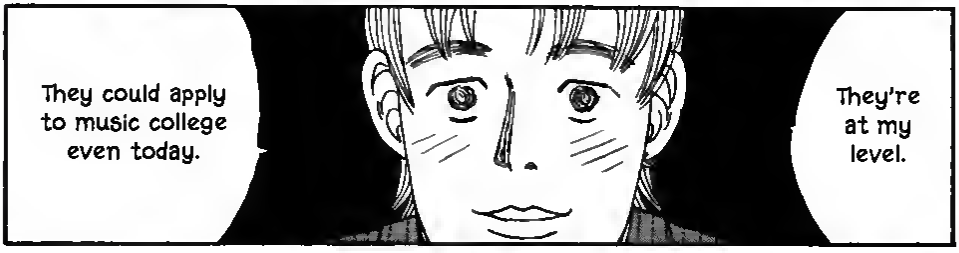
And you! Helping Uta deceive me!
I'm still drinking.
Finish your coffee and leave already!
You're still here?
Stop, you're making me faint...
I'm always worried that she'll lose her deft touch all because of baseball...
I tried to stop her, you know...
You're fired as her tutor!
...really likes baseball more right now.
But... Uta...

I can't control how she feels.
.....
...so her emotions come out in her playing.
Music is organic...
.....
No!
Uta is going to win this competition.
She must!
What?
There is one way...

1997
YMC
Young
Pianist
Competition
First
Round
Auditorium
And this'll be the first time I hear Uta's music in this kind of setting.
I'm so nervous. Like I'm the one competing.
1997 YMC
Young Pianist Competition


Wow, everyone's so good even though they're just elementary school kids...




They could apply to music college even today.
They're at my level.

Enough.

Oh!

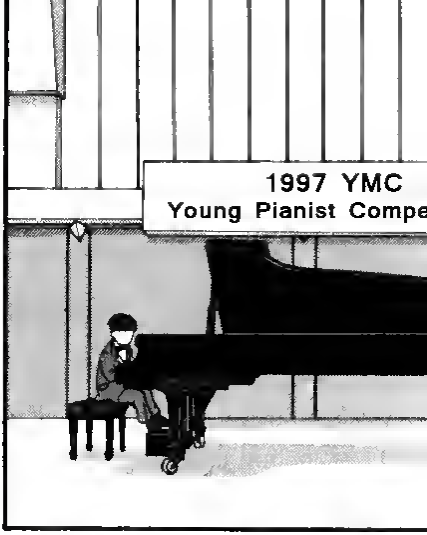
I'm really good at the next movement.
The next...
.....
It's all right.
Mama!
ヒ〜エ〜ン
WAHH〜
You did great.
It's okay.
しゅたたたた
TUT TUT TUT

She sucks.
So you must be "oh so good."
I said she sucks because she does. She sucks.
You're mean!
You shouldn't say stuff like that!

...she gets it from!
Well! No wonder, where...
すぅ LOOM
Uta's very good.
You don't even compare.
YUP YUP
So true.
Someone with an ugly soul only produces ugly sounds.
Music comes from your soul.
But if I win, Mama will let me play baseball. So I have to.
It's not like I want to play here.
The one with the most beautiful soul will win this competition.
Oh, I totally agree.

Aren't you eating too much, dear?
The piano here makes me sick.
Our Steinway.
Sta-chan?
I only want to play on the Sta-chan at home.
She's making excuses for when she loses.
It's all because of the piano here.
CONTES TANTS DRESSING ROOM
Gotta put back what I lost.
I've got diarrhea.
Just when she's trying to concentrate on beautiful music too.
Horrid girl.
LADY
'Cause I pooped in it.
Oh, if you go to the bathroom now it probably stinks.

Especially when we have to listen to music like this.
I'm starting to get a headache.
Phew ...

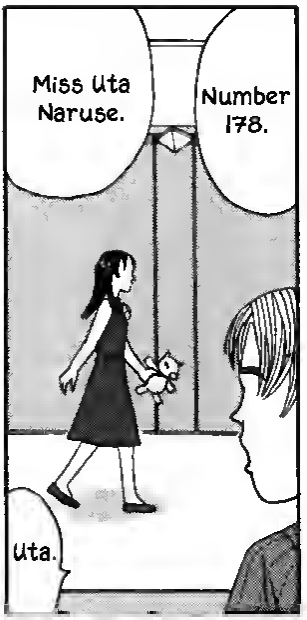

1997 YMC
Young Pianist Compe

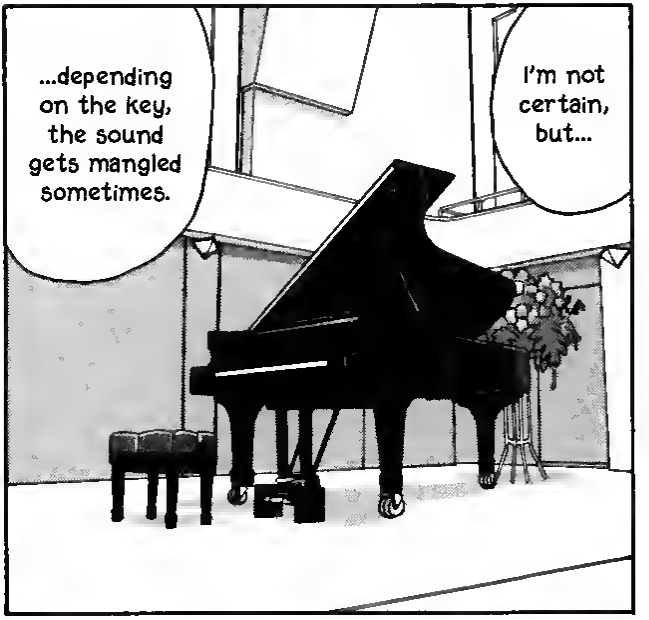
We all ate the same lunch.
Maybe it was the lunch?

Is there something in the air? I feel sick to my stomach.

That piano.

Well, listening to 200 contestants in three days...
...will make anyone sick.


Miss Uta Naruse.
Number 178.
Uta.


...depending on the key, the sound gets mangled sometimes.
I'm not certain, but...

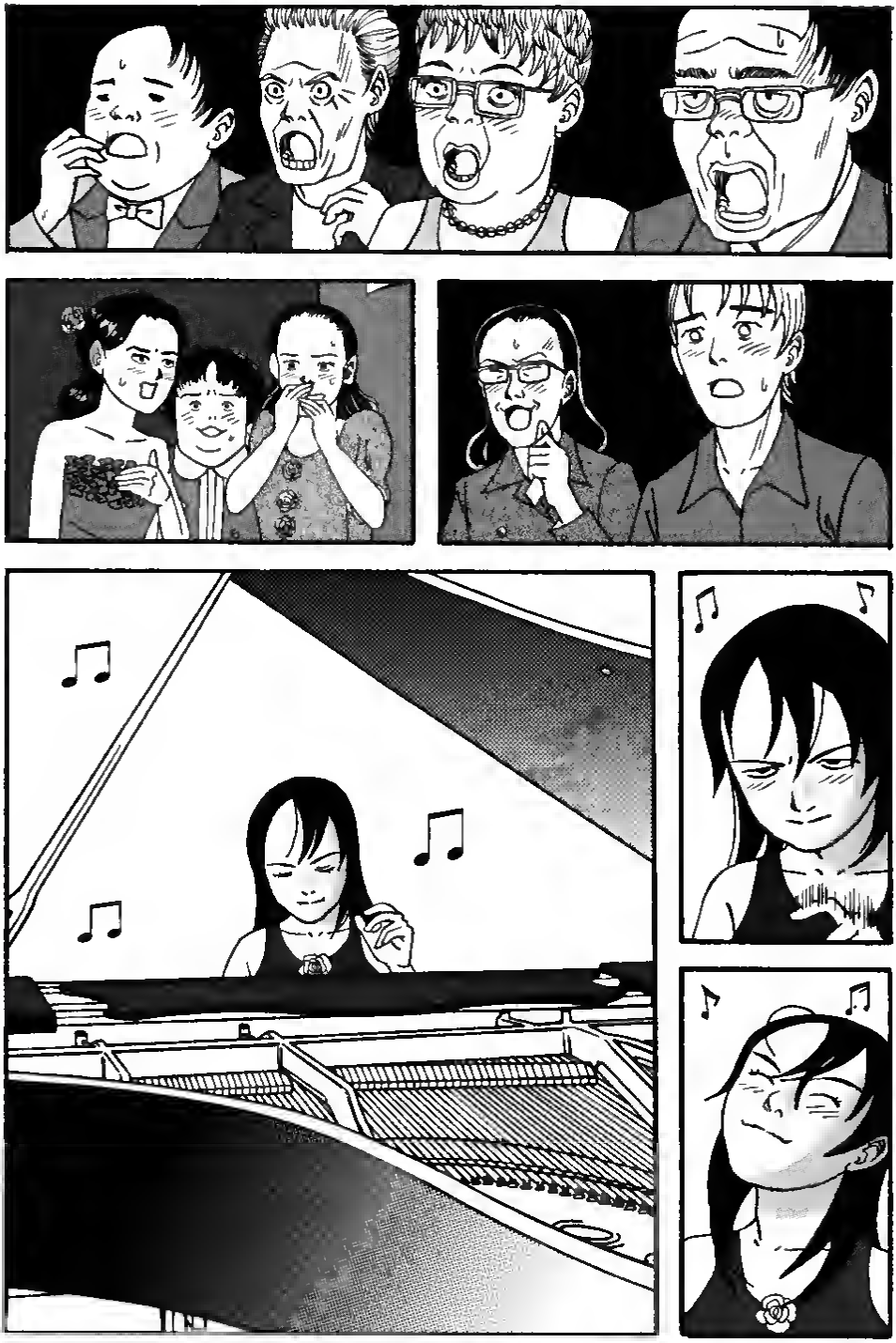
ひょい
PLOP

I hope she messes up.
It's her.

Oh my god...
Uta...
It's a piano angel.

.....
...
piano...
...isn't in tune.
This...
STEINWAY & SONS
Uta!
She's out!
She quit in the middle of it!
BUZZ

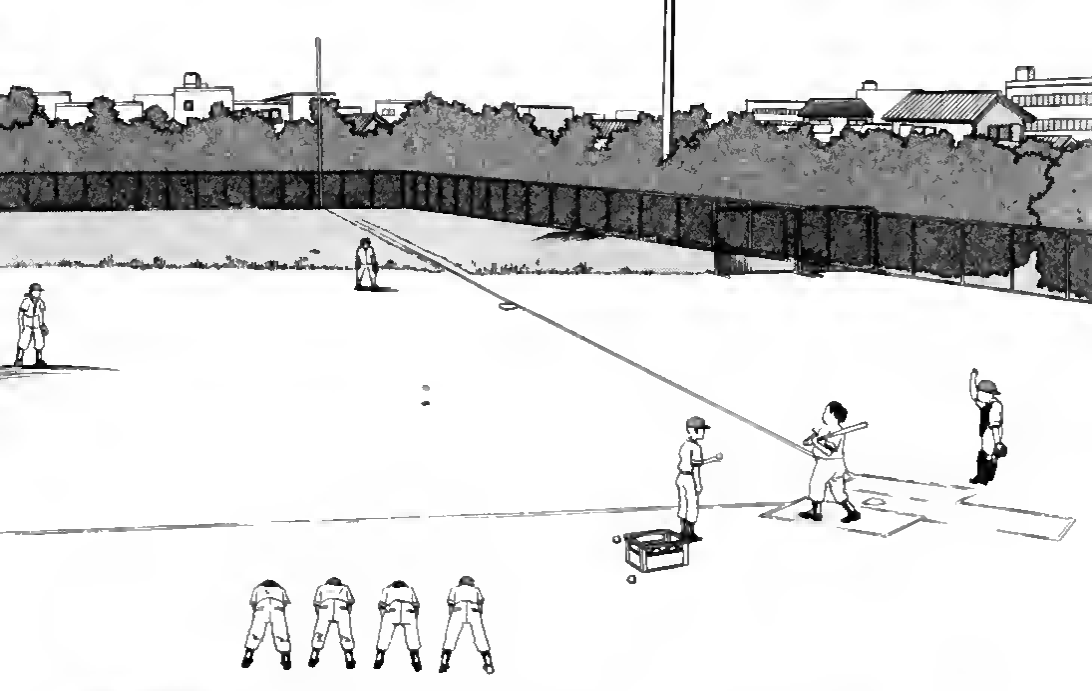
Impossible!
19
Young Pi
I think it's the F-sharp and the C-natural keys...
Uta.
.....
What should we do? Disqualify her?
Ah.
You're definitely my student, Wao.
1997 YMC
Young Pianist Competition
It's a very subtle glitch.
Call a piano technician.

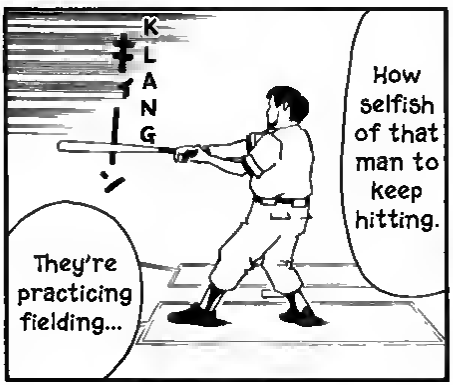


I've never heard this Shostakovich piece played like this...
...in all my years of music.

CREAK
キ"
!...

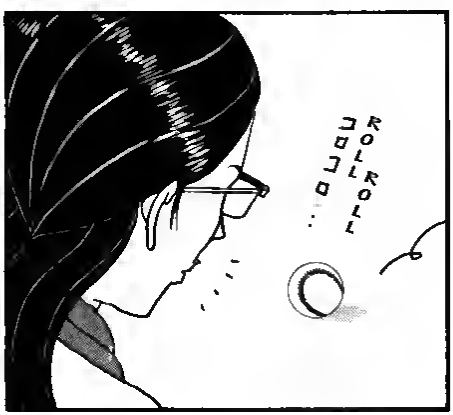
Chapter 8 The Team Song




KLANG
How selfish of that man to keep hitting.
They're practicing fielding...

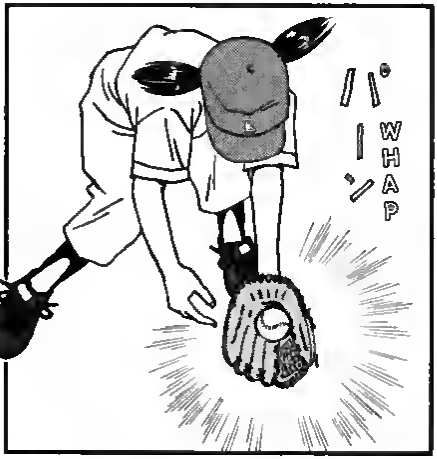
Isn't Uta supposed to be pitching?!

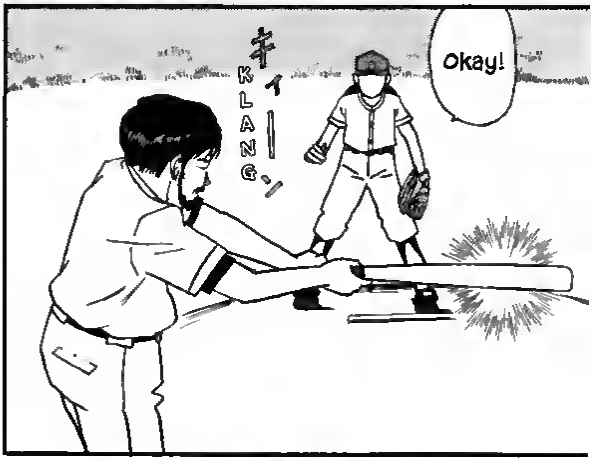
It's not a rubber ball...
This ...
This is what they use?!


ROLL
ROLL
ROLL

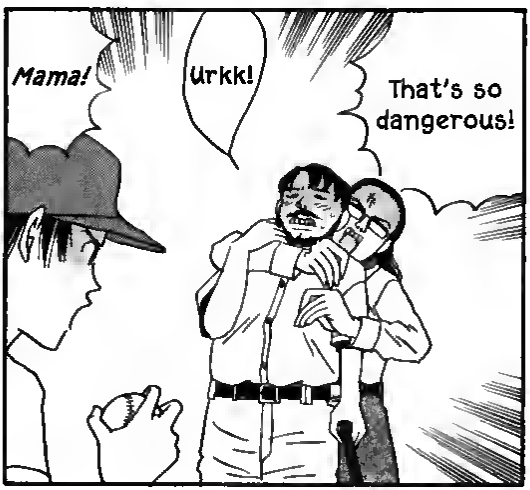
She'll die!
If this hits her...

She'll break her fingers!
If this hits her...


WHAP

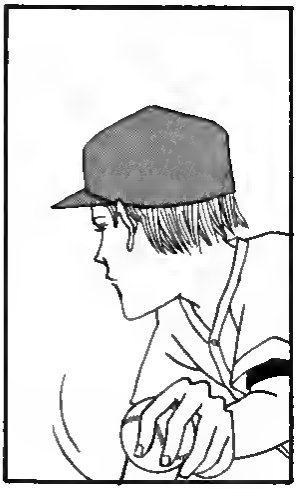

Okay!
キィーン
KLANG

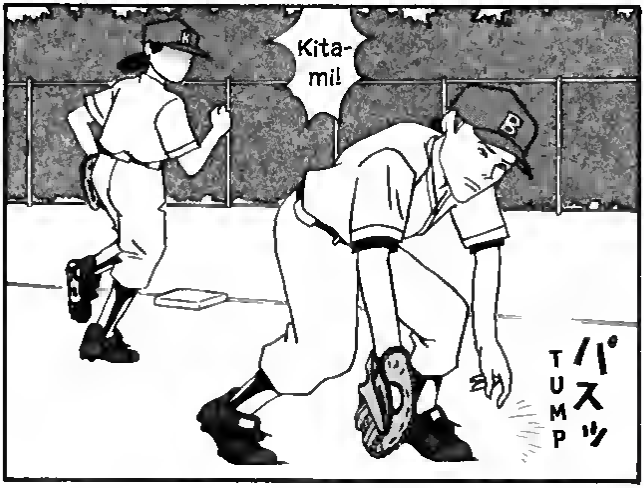
Uta's mom.
Who's that?
Get off the field!

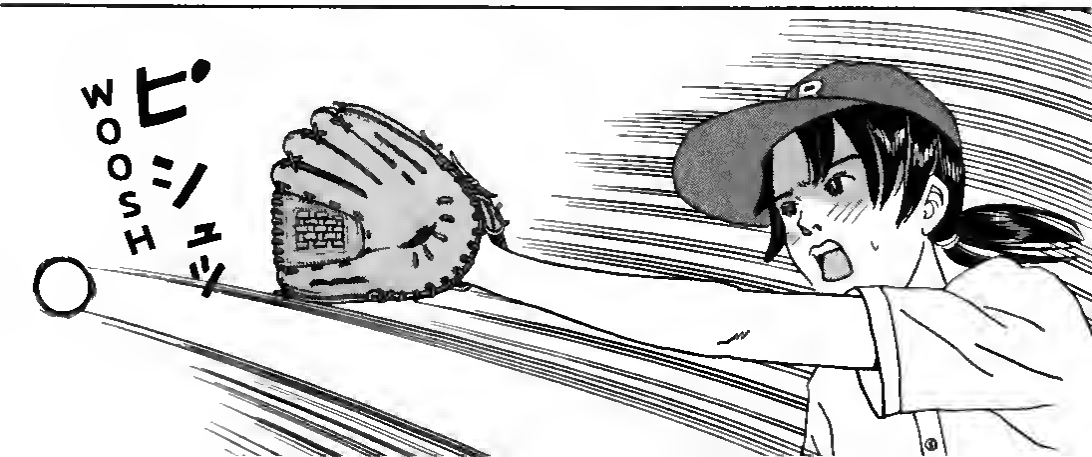

Mama!
Urkk!
That's so dangerous!

キーン
KLANG

I'm too scared to watch.
Ohh!
...what baseball is.
This is...




Kita-mi!
パスッ
TUMP


ビシュッ
WOOSH

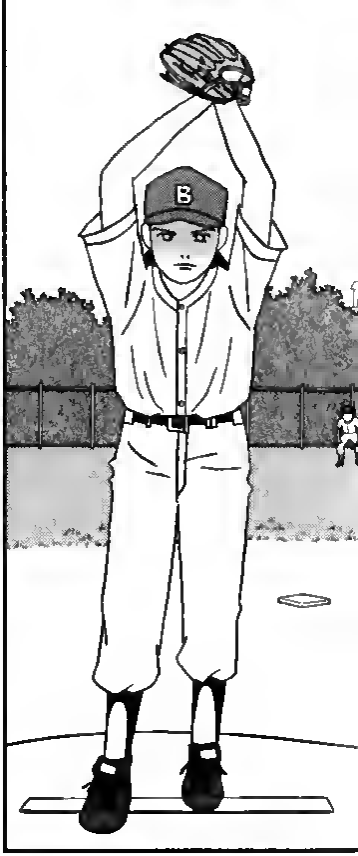
You were too slow to get it.
Huh?
Where d'ya think you're throwing it, Kitami ?!
...never admits she's wrong.
Y'know, Uta...
Here they go again.
Mama!
...I'll make sure you pay for it!
If you dare touch my daughter...
...like mother.
Like daughter...
Mama! Stay out of it! Go watch in the stands!
For a big guy you move too slow!

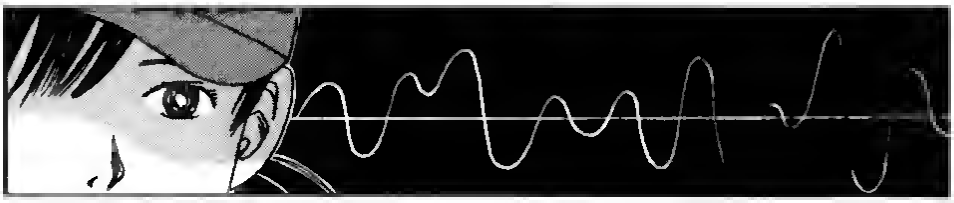
Come here!
Uta!
If a friend makes an error, it's up to the ace to make it up.
Baseball is played by nine people.
...on errors.
You're way too harsh...
...can definitely do better.
'Cause I know that this team...
...but I can't stop myself...
I know that...

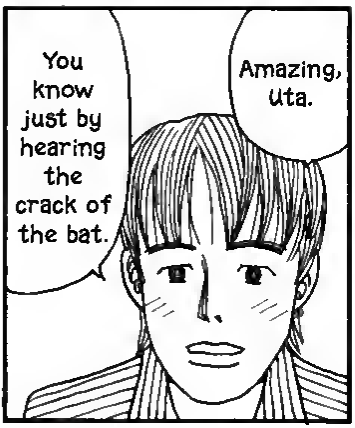
ぴくっ
FUENCHI
So it was you who dragged Uta into this violent sport!
She's got her hands full, eh?
Mama! Just stay out of it!
...find people's faults.
She can only...
...but our teamwork got worse.
When Uta joined, our pitching stats went up...
...but it shows how dedicated she is.
Uta's harsh on you guys...

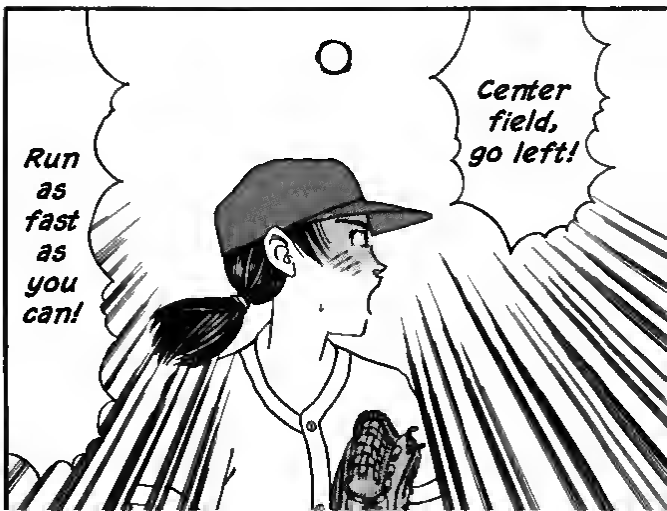
Oh, that might just be an assumption on my part.
She can't play anymore ...?!
It can't be...
...soon she won't be able to play baseball anymore.
I think she knows that...
THAT'S WHAT I THINK ANYWAY.
WHEN SHE'S PLAYING BASEBALL, MUSIC IS ALWAYS PLAYING INSIDE HER.
.....
She's anxious to play baseball while she still can.
She'll eventually have to give up baseball and return to the piano.

カキッ
KRAK

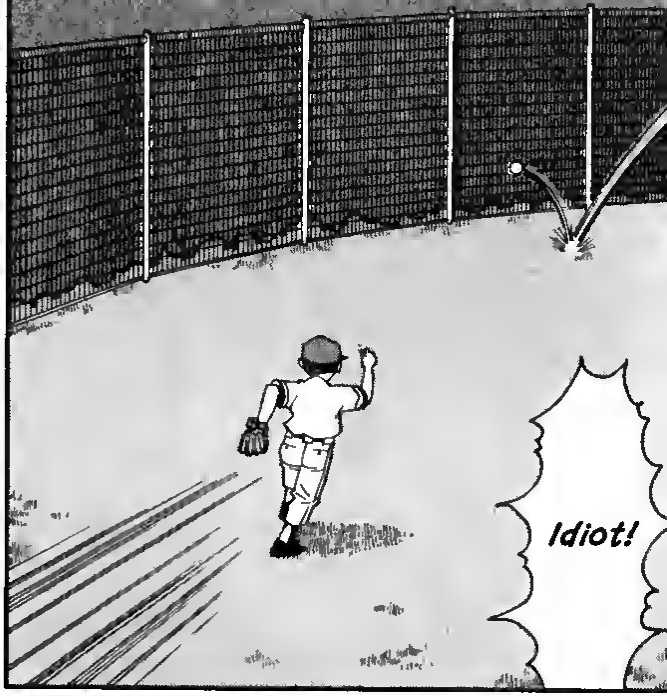

B

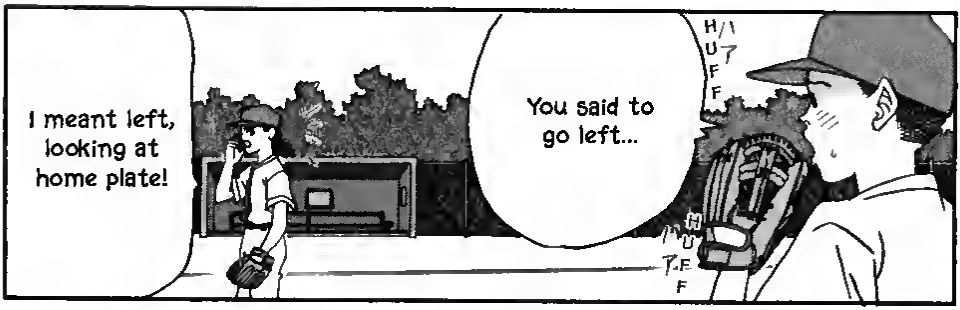



You know just by hearing the crack of the bat.
Amazing, Uta.


Run as fast as you can!
Center field, go left!

What the hell are you doing?!


Idiot!


I meant left, looking at home plate!
You said to go left...
HUFF
HUFF

With Kumomoto's legs...
I know he can get it.

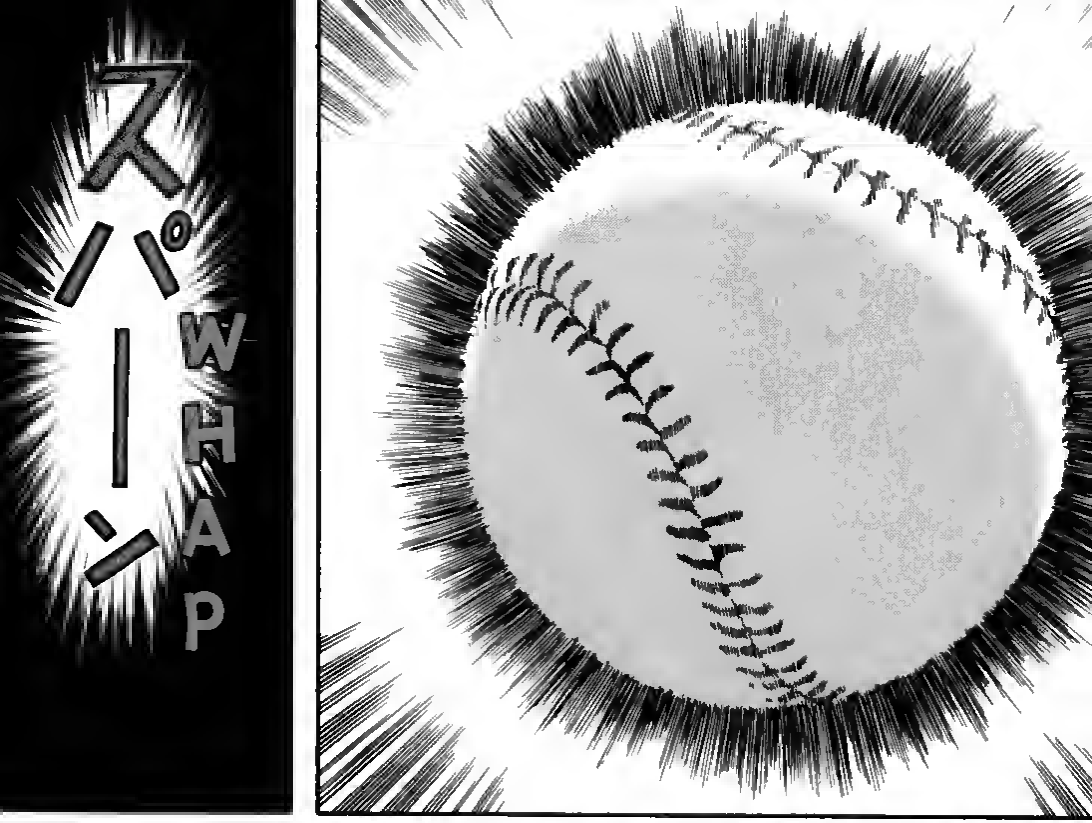
.....
I know he can!

Hmph! Starting again, huh?
I'll give the commands.
Uta.

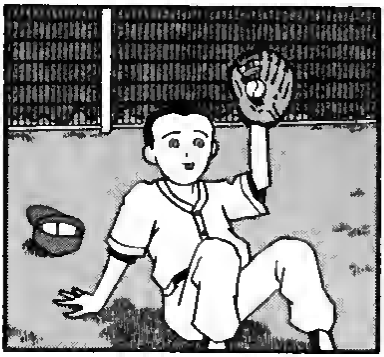
Yes?
Uta!
Now she's gonna get it.
You give the commands!
Yes!
Huh?

.....
I'll be hitting it into the stands.
Heh. It don't matter.
ヒュンッ
SWISH
Um... This is just batting practice...
Ohh... Now they're in a bind all thanks to that little runt!
キィィン
KRANG

E-
Easy for you to say.
B
Center field! Go back to the right!
B
...and turn around!
Run 10 steps...
SPIN
7,8,9...
3,4,5,6...


スパーン
WHAP

Whoaaaaa.



……
コホン!
KOFF

Uta's right again!
Ho ho ho ho!

You're injured.
Kitami...
I can tell by the sound of your swing.
What are you taking about?
B
I reinjured where I dislocated my shoulder back when I was in second grade.
.....

You're our best first baseman.
Of course I won't say anything.

I want to play in the championship game!
Don't tell the coach!

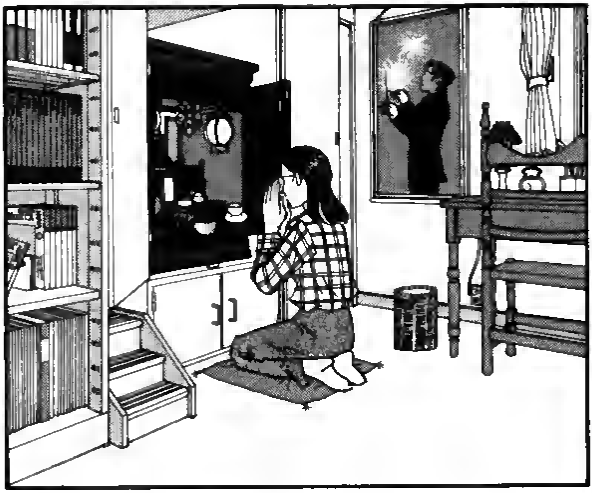
Hmph!

But you better not be making any more errors, stupid!

Naga-tsuda ...
...knows a lot about all of us.
She actually...

Just like us.
She loves baseball...

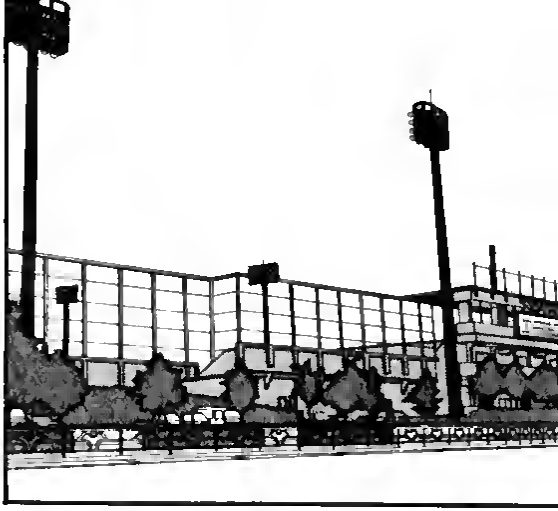
She wouldn't be able to tell us what to do if she didn't know how fast each player was and their defensive range.

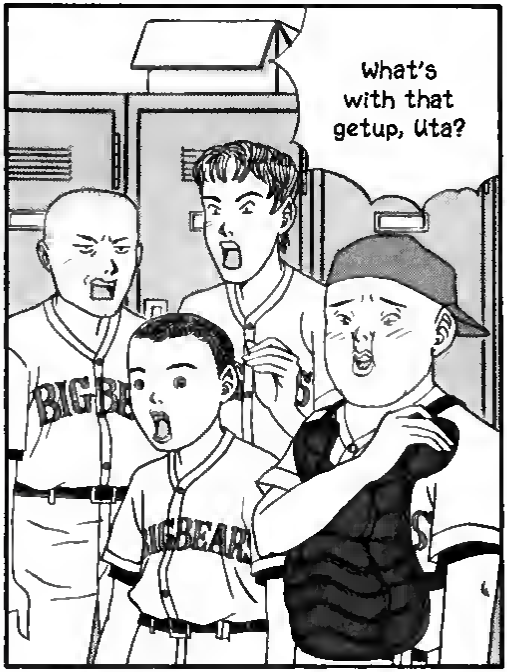


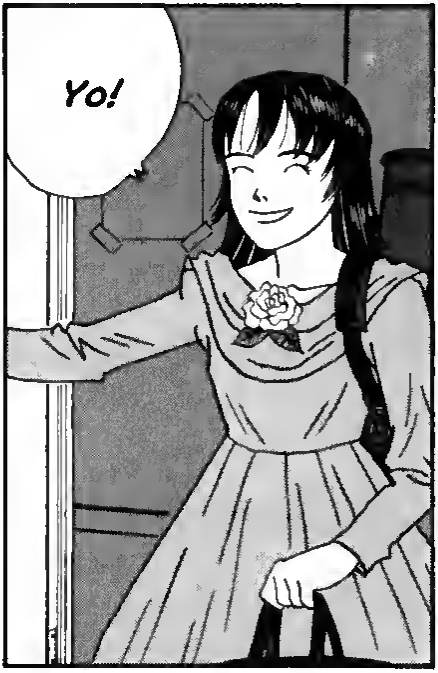
...
this stupid baseball-playing girl so that she doesn't get hurt.
Please watch over...
...Uta has passed the first round of the competition.
Dear...
Thanks to you...
It's not about the money.
I'm just worried about her.
No...
Though if we had the money...
Dear Sir or Madam:
This is to inform you that your loan payment
and corresponding delinquent charges, which
was previously requested to be paid on this day
of this month, have not been received. Since we
have not heard from you, pleese come to the
institution on this day of this month to
settle the loan in full.
If we do not hear from you by the day
requested, we will be forced to contact
the co-signer of this loan.
...I could also protect this house.
CHAPTER 3: THE TEAM SONG • THE END

Chapter 9 The Seeing vs. Hearing Song

19TH ANNUAL DIAMOND TOURNAMENT
<EAST TOKYO REGIONAL FINALS>
SPONSORED BY JAPANESE JUNIOR BASEBALL ASSOCIATION

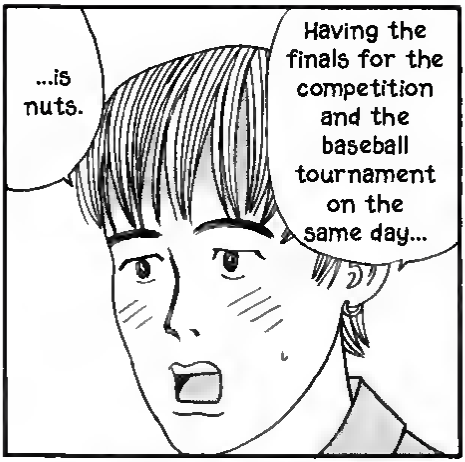



What's with that getup, Uta?

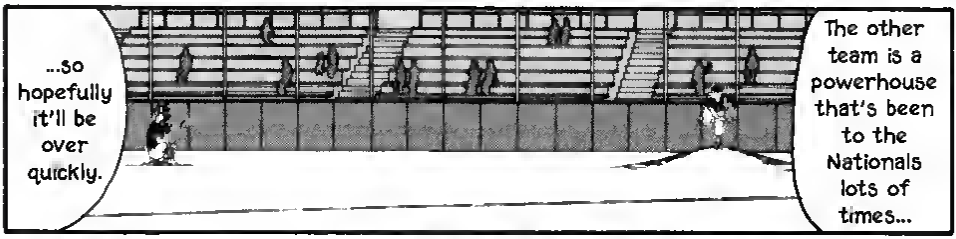

Yo!

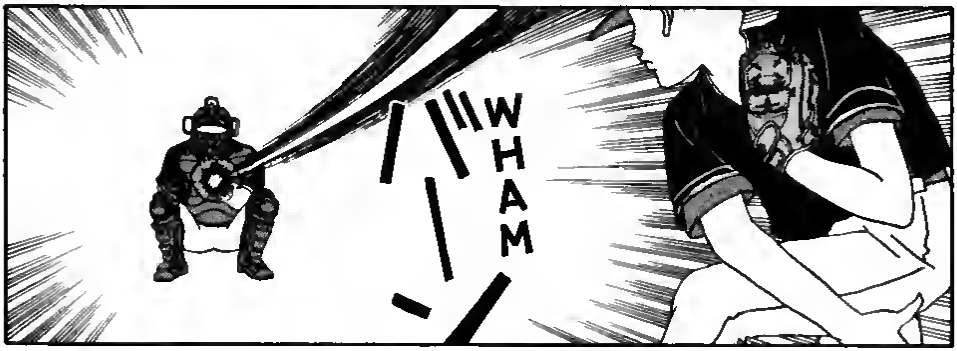
...is going to be in the competition finals!
LOOM
This afternoon, Uta...

...but I hafta win the competition.
I can play in the game...
Right?
BIG BEARS
I got it!
Do you understand, Uta?!
Got that?!
So!
For Uta, winning the YMC...
...to win the competition?
Is it that easy...
...is guaranteed!
Mama, enough! Go back to the stands!
You better not let Uta get hurt!


Having the finals for the competition and the baseball tournament on the same day...
...is nuts.

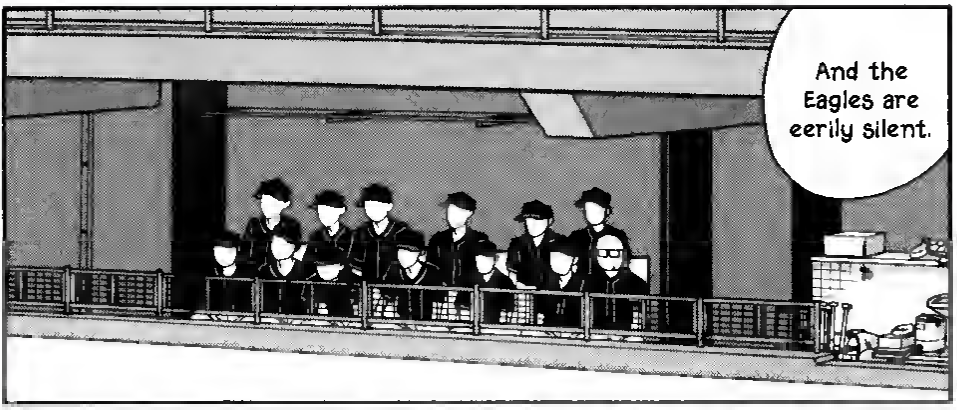
Y'know ...

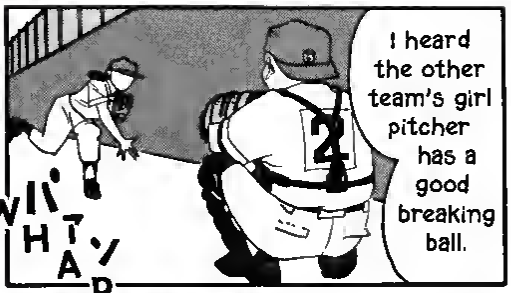

The other team is a powerhouse that's been to the Nationals lots of times...
...so hopefully it'll be over quickly.


WHAM

The Big Bears team seems intimidated.

That's so fast...!


And the Eagles are eerily silent.

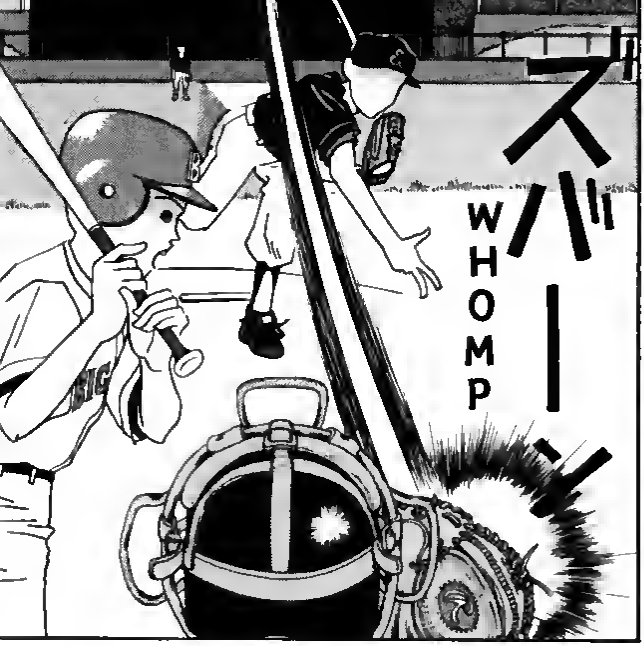

WHAP
I heard the other team's girl pitcher has a good breaking ball.

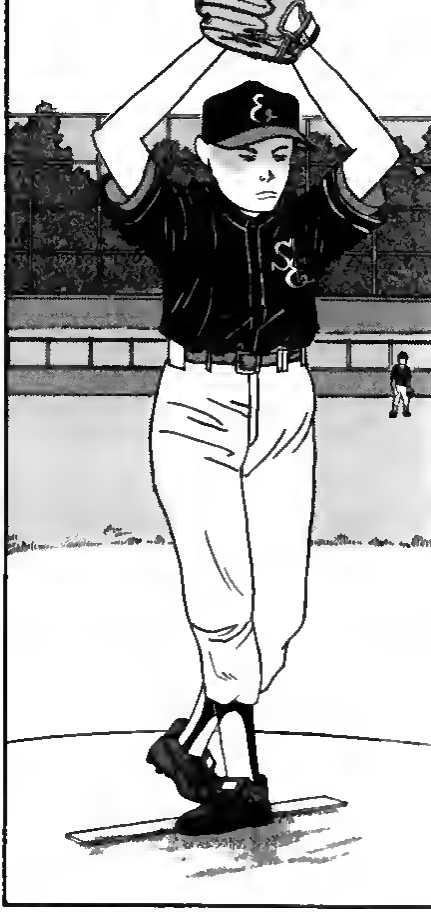
What do you think, Marume?

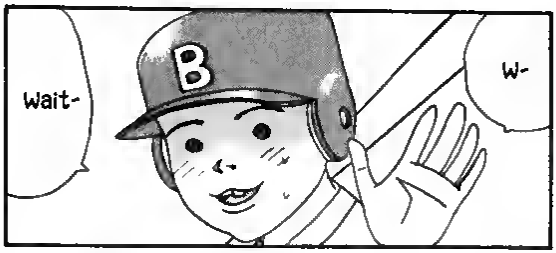
Play ball!

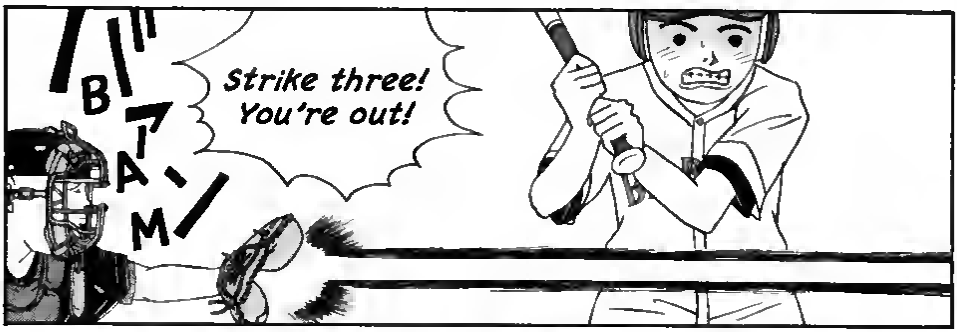
It ain't nuthin'.

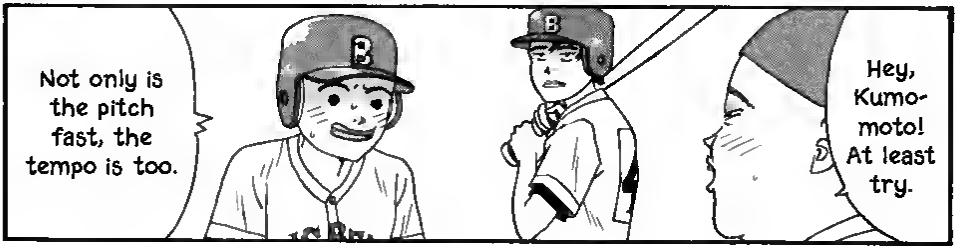
It just means that...
...you get to watch the ball that much longer.


ズ
WHOMP

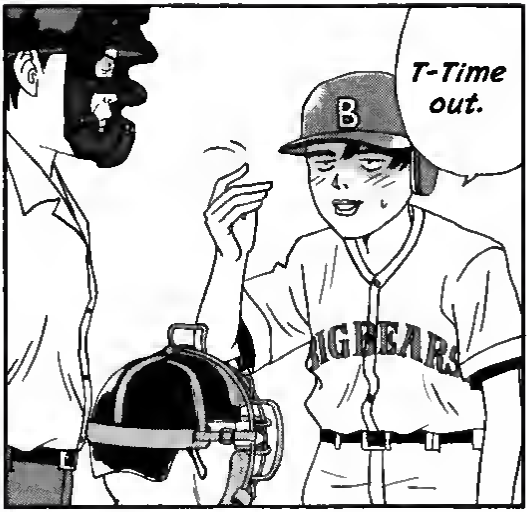



Wait-
W-


BAM
Strike three! You're out!

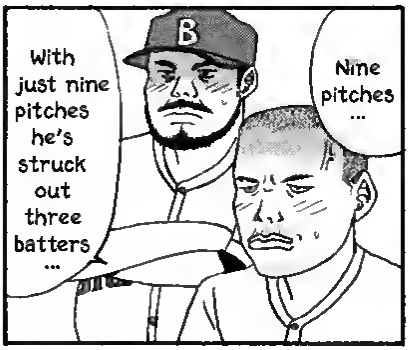

Not only is the pitch fast, the tempo is too.
Hey, Kumomoto! At least try.

I need to stall just a little.

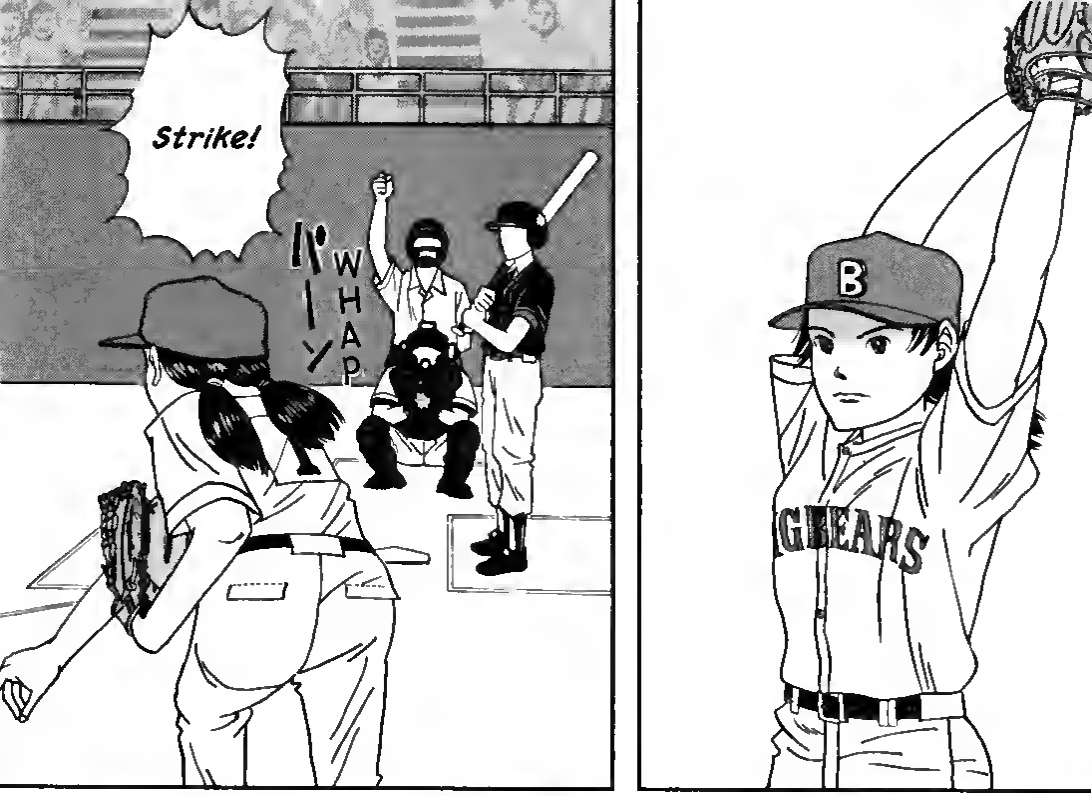

T-Time out.
B
BIGBEARS

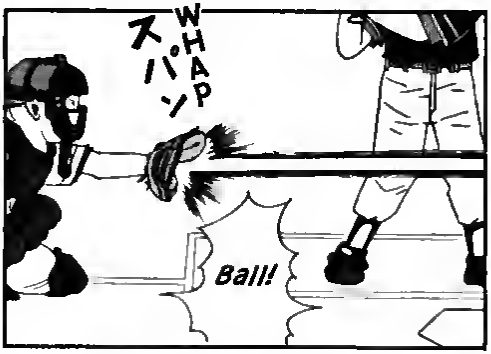
Strike three! You're out!
WHOMP

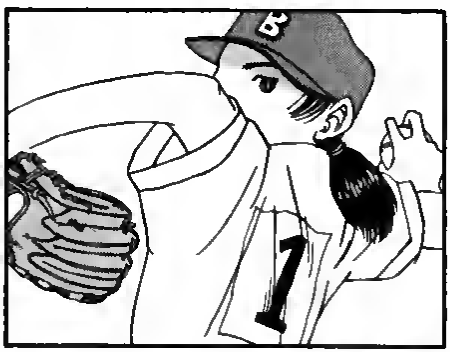
I gotta hit some fouls and keep him pitching.
B


With just nine pitches he's struck out three batters ...
Nine pitches ...
B

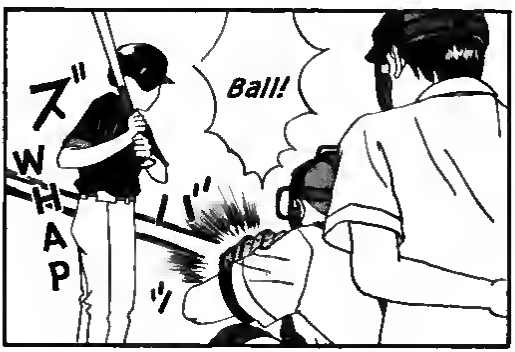
Strike three! You're out!
WHOMP
B


Strike!
パーン
WHAP
B
GBEARS


スパーン
WHAP
Ball!


B
1

Strike!
バ"ア"ン
BAM

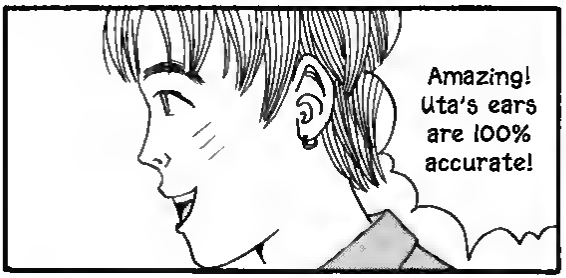

Ball!
ズ
WHAP
バ"
ッ

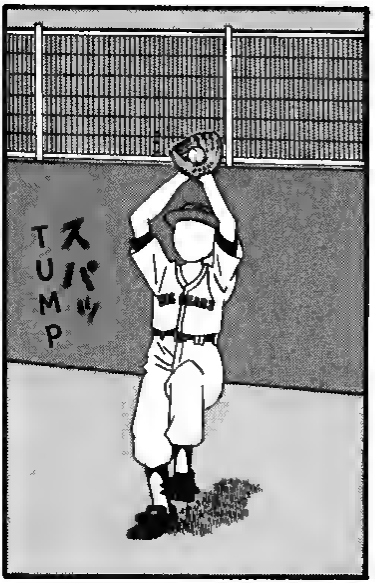
カリ
KRAK

The other team is really looking at the pitches, unlike the Bears.

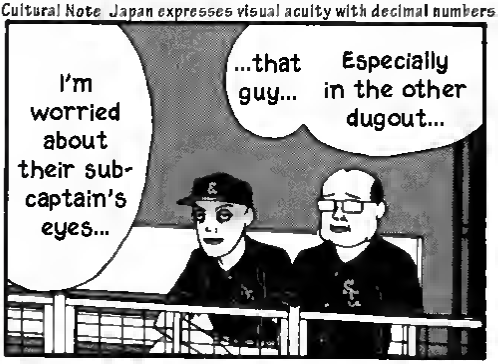
Five steps at 10 o'clock!
Right field!

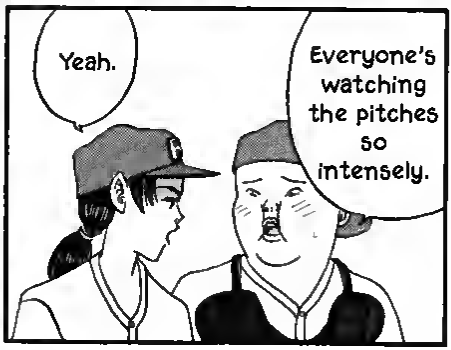
.....
Ohh...


Amazing! Uta's ears are 100% accurate!


スパッ
TUMP

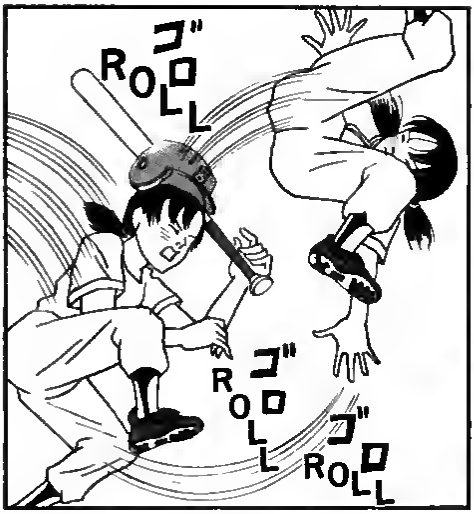
Cultural Note: Japan expresses visual acuity with decimal numbers. 1.0 = 20/20.

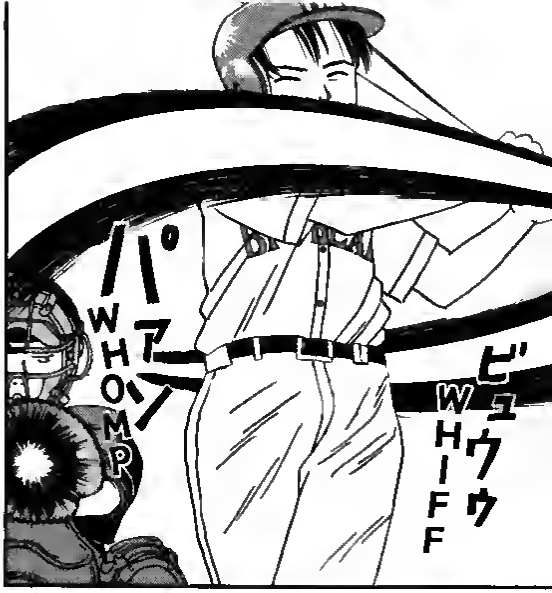


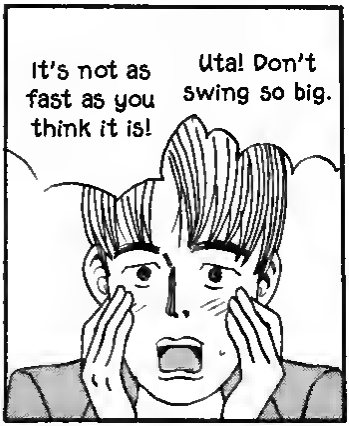


TN 1 2 3 4
BEARS 0 0
EAGLES 0 0
すWSH
7
So I gotta do something...
Uta's keeping 'em down.
Strike three! You're out!
...!
BEARS
ゴォ
オォ
V'E'E'E'N

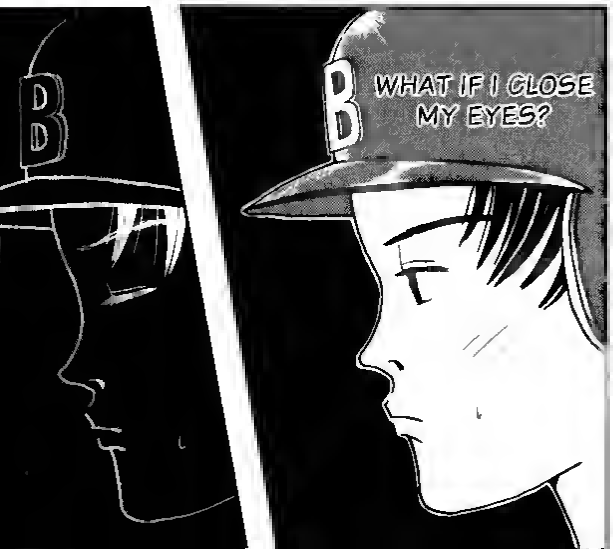
What if that ball hits her?!
How scary.
No we aren't.
Uta, we're counting on you!
6
B
BIG BEARS


ゴロ
ROLL
ゴロ
ROLL
ゴロ
ROLL


パア
WHOMP
ビュウウ
WHIFF


It's not as fast as you think it is!
Uta! Don't swing so big.

SMIRK
HA
HA
HA

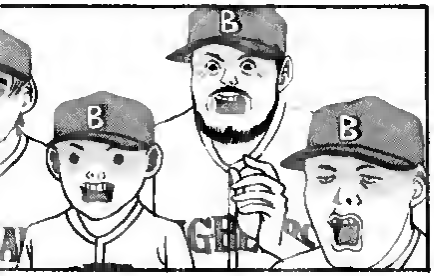

B
B
WHAT IF I CLOSE MY EYES?

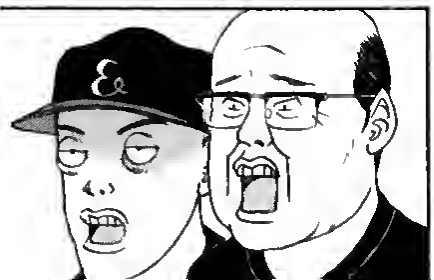
Do I think it's so fast because I'm looking at it?
Got it...

I'M SCARED...

I CAN SEE...
...THE OTHER DUGOUT...
I CAN HEAR...
...FATTY'S VOICE...
She's...
...closed her eyes!
I CAN EVEN HEAR THE PITCHER'S BREATHING...
I'm gonna throw it.
Hmph!
Uta!
THE PATH OF THE PITCH...
I CAN SEE IT!

B
B
B


B
B
B

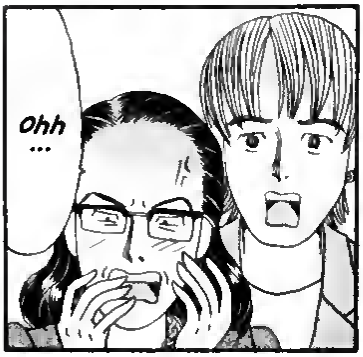


B

1

RATH
Crap!
We were in too close thinking she couldn't hit it far!
BIG BEAR
Catcher! Block her at 10 o'clock!

R

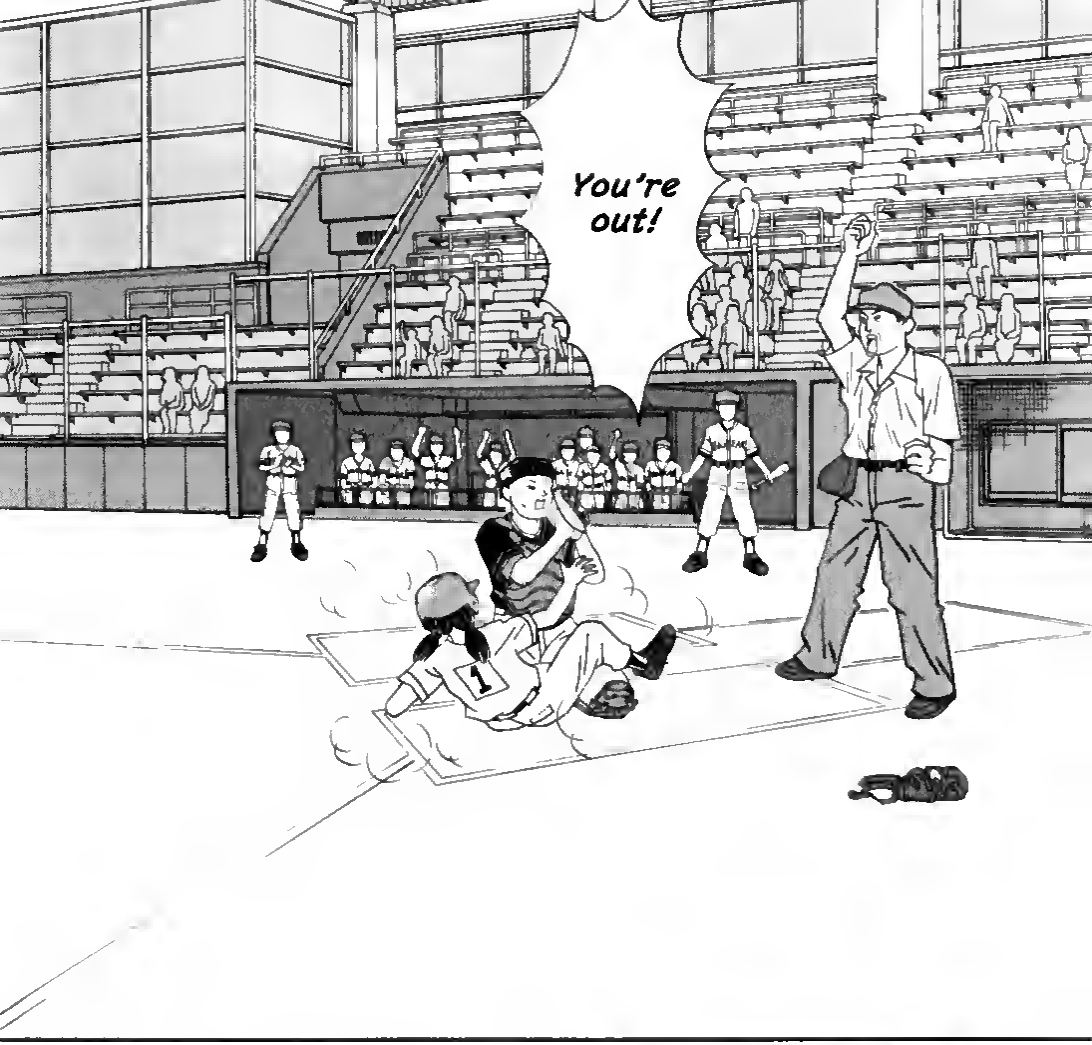

Ohh
...

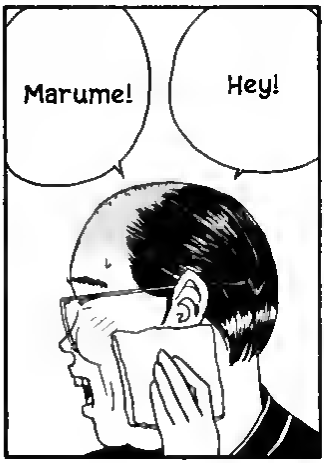
B

You should practice your sliding more!
Heh heh.

You're out!

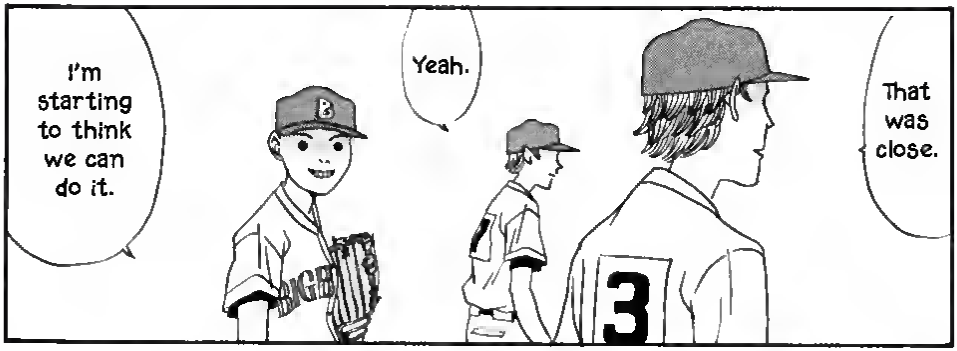
Chapter 10 The Wind Song

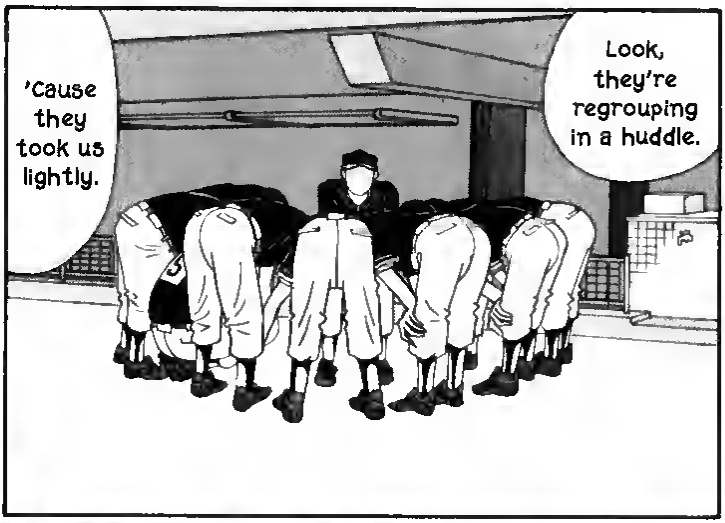

You're out!

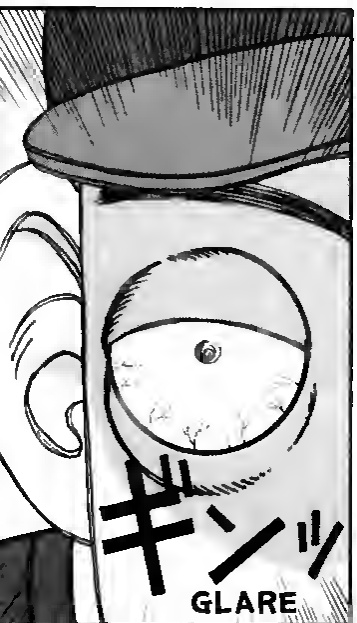

Marume!
Hey!

That was dangerously close, eh, Marume?
Phew...

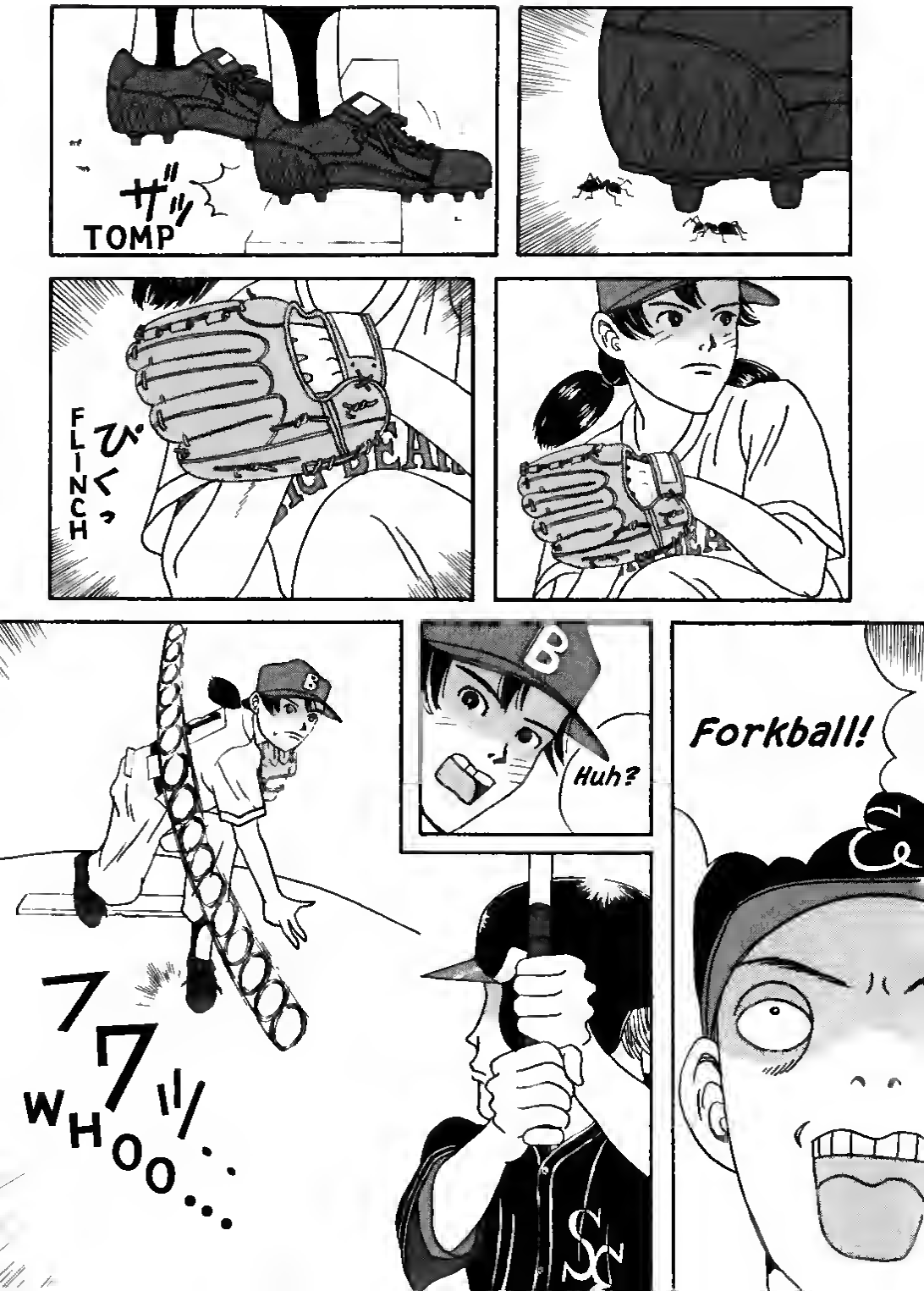
... Coach.
Look at that...
Baseball is fun, Coach
Hey!
What are you relaxing for?
The black kites are so free.
I've already figured out their weakness.
We've seen all the batters.
Calm down, Coach.
Hey, are you using your 5.0 vision for birdwatching?!
The black kite?
What is it?
Wh-


I'm starting to think we can do it.
Yeah.
That was close.

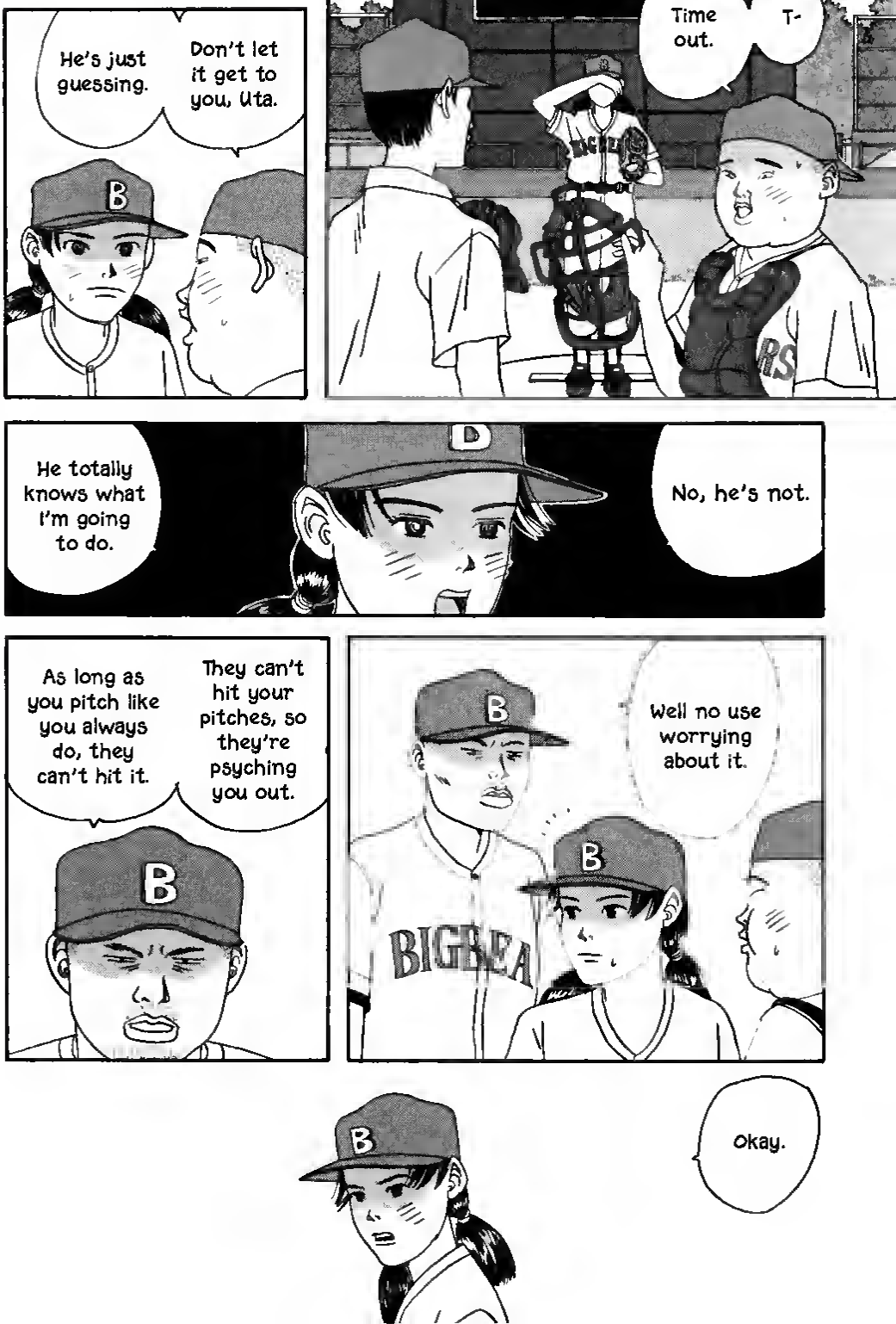

'Cause they took us lightly.
Look, they're regrouping in a huddle.


GLARE

You're like a little puppet that I control in the palm of my hand.
Heh heh... Uta Naruse...


TOMP
FLINCH
びくっ
Huh?
Forkball!
WHOO...

ザッ
ZSH
キィーン
KLANG
B
Almost got it.
Heh...
Balk!
ぴくっ
FLINCH
Slider!
B
BEARS


He's just guessing.
Don't let it get to you, Uta.
TN 1 2 3 4 5 6 7
BEARS 0 0 0
EAGLES 0 0
Time out.
T-
He totally knows what I'm going to do.
No, he's not.
As long as you pitch like you always do, they can't hit it.
They can't hit your pitches, so they're psyching you out.
Well no use worrying about it.
BIGBEA
Okay.

Slider!
OH NO...
TN
B
BIGBEARS
WHIRR...
It's in the sweet spot ...

Wow, what a great upswing!
キイイ・・・
KRAK
3
8
t=TUT
t=TUT
t=TUT
t=TUT
Ten steps at 11 o' clock!
Center field!
B
Huh?
SPIN

ポテ〜ン
PLONK
That... can't be...!
Ahh!
Curve-ball!
Let's keep our cool!

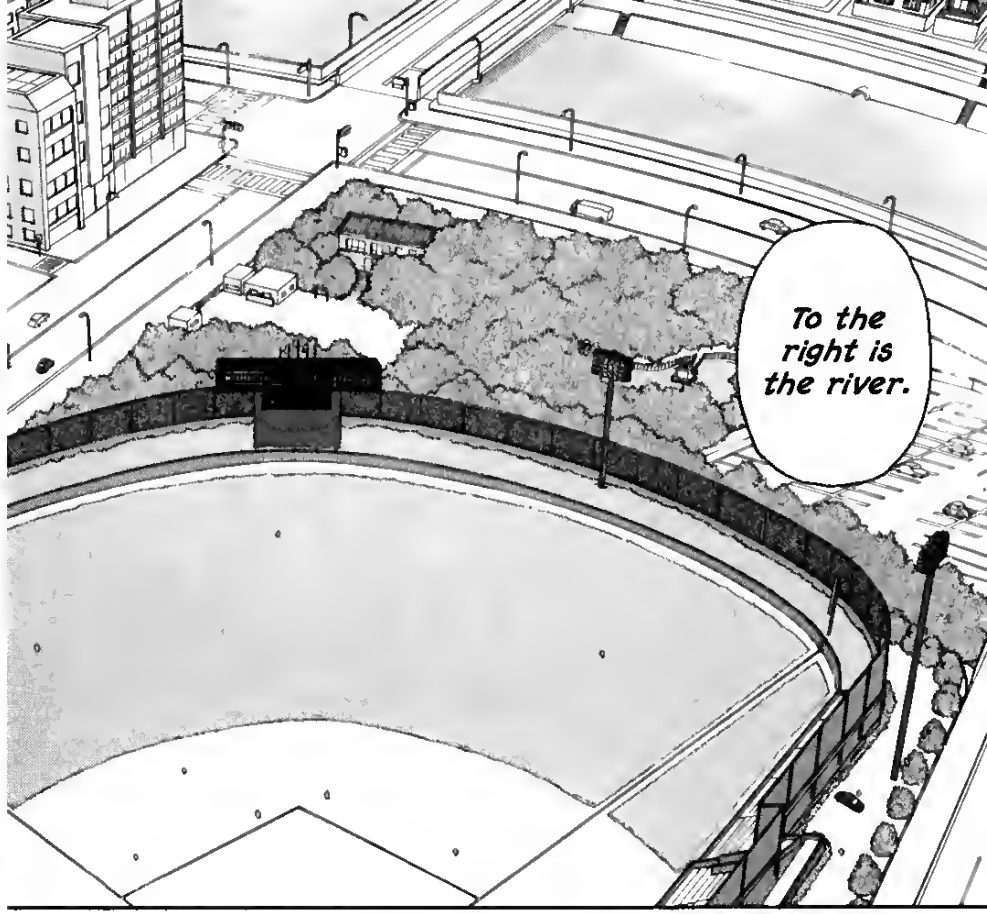
ぽてっ
plop
Five steps at 3 o'clock!
Left field!
B
Hey!
B
No, you're not!
I am!
Run where I tell you to run!
B
This is bad...
7

IT'S BECAUSE THEY DON'T PRACTICE ENOUGH.
THEIR LEGS ARE TIRED FROM ALL THAT RUNNING.
IT'S NO USE. WE SHOULDN'T DEPEND ON UTA. WE GOTTA USE OUR OWN EYES.
SHE'S LOST HER COOL BECAUSE THEY KEEP HITTING HER PITCHES.

はっ
OH!
They're obviously aiming to hit those fly balls...
Everyone's got a great upswing.
びゅうううう
WOOOOO
だだだっ
DASH
B
Listen to the sound of the wind!
Uta!
It's the wind!
WSH
WSH
WSH

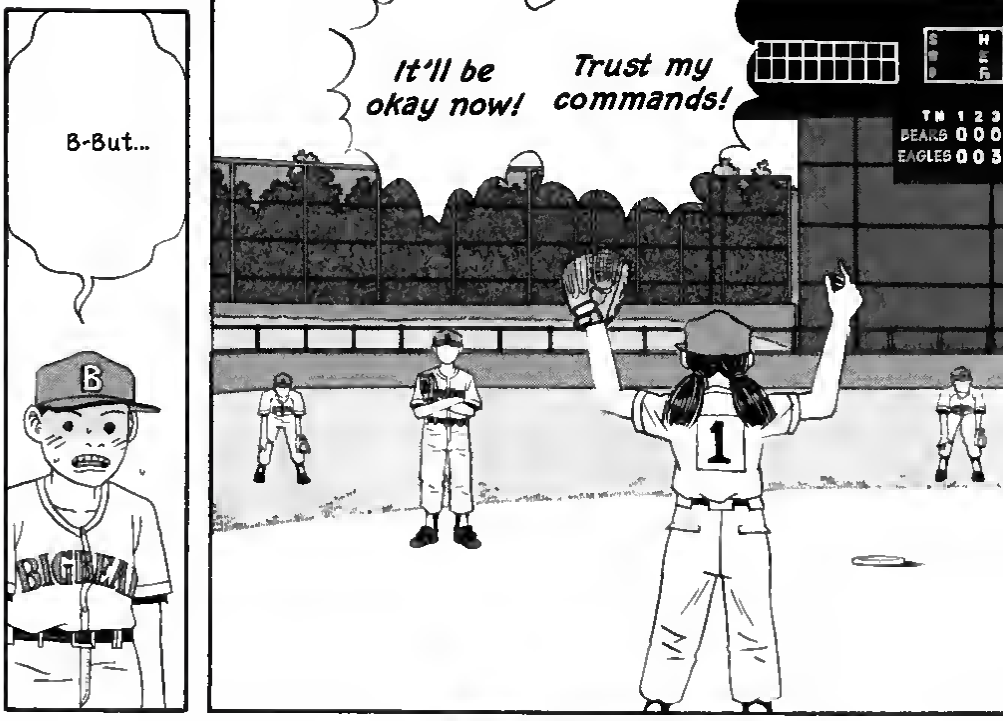
The sound of the river...
B

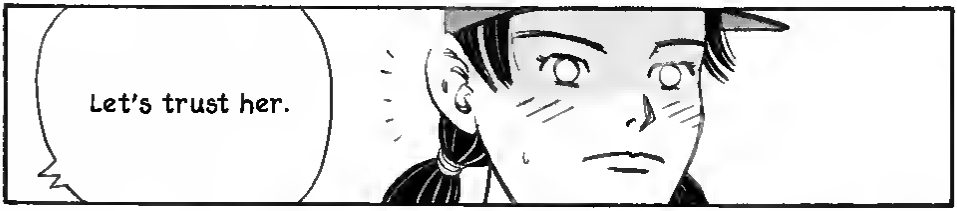
To the left is the city.

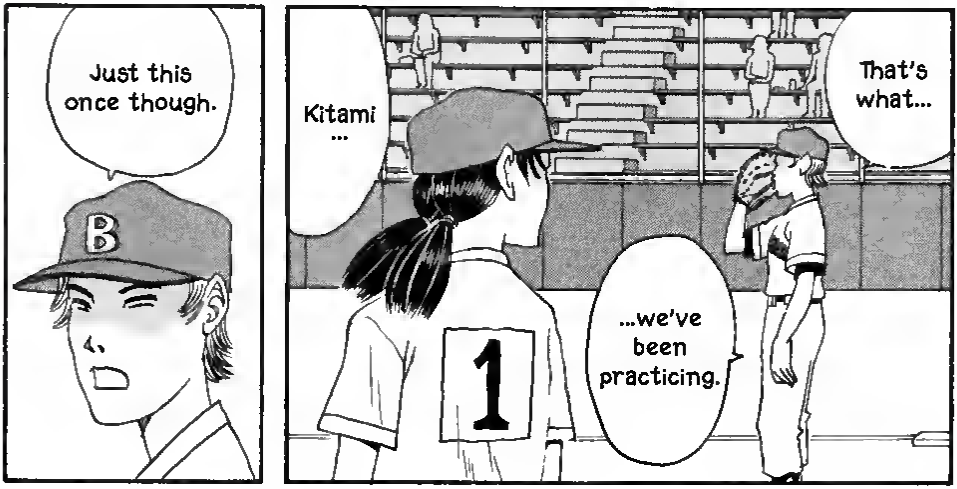

To the right is the river.

The sound of the wind...
B

An approaching typhoon is making it blow harder.
ひゅ
wooう
oooう...
The wind flowing off the river is swirling up high.


B-But...
It'll be okay now!
Trust my commands!
TM 1 2 3
BEARS 0 0 0
EAGLES 0 0 3
1

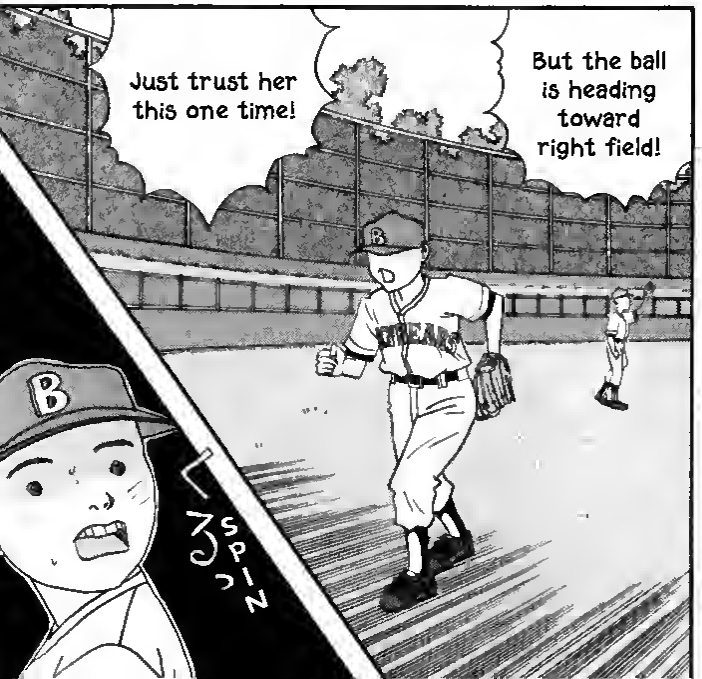

Let's trust her.


Just this once though.
Kitami ...
That's what...
...we've been practicing.
1

Slider!

KLANG
キイイ‥ン

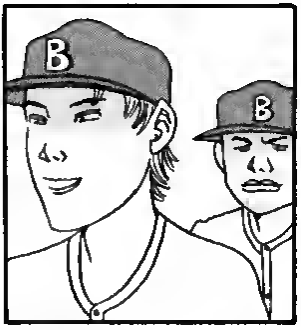
B

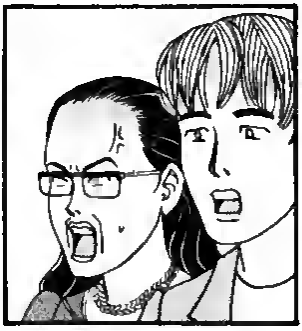

Just trust her this one time!
But the ball is heading toward right field!
B
SPIN
シュ〜ン

Center field! Run as fast as you can 15 steps at 10 o'clock!

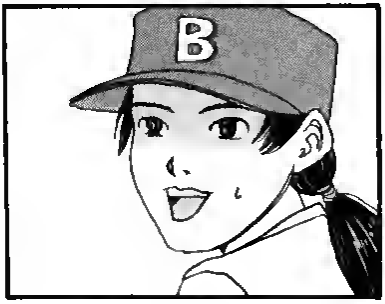
BAM

IT'S HERE...!
BIGBEAR

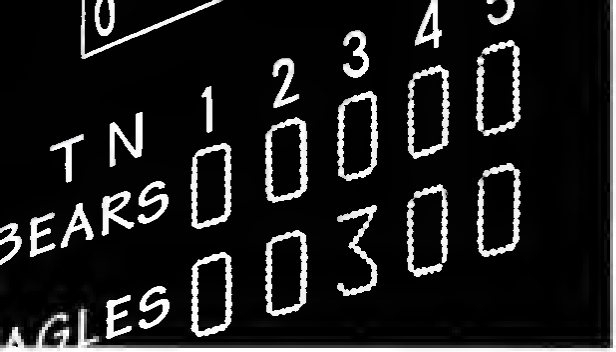




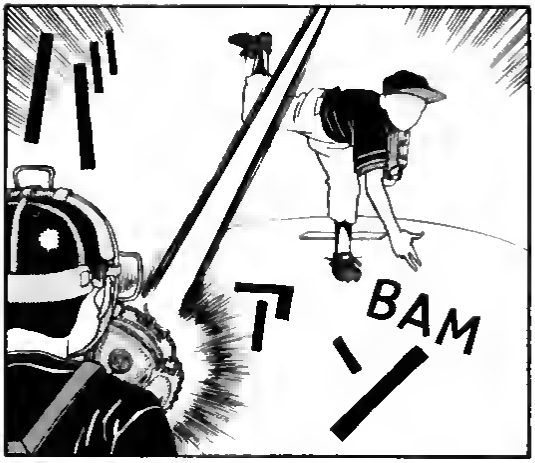
We've already got this in the bag!
Hmph!

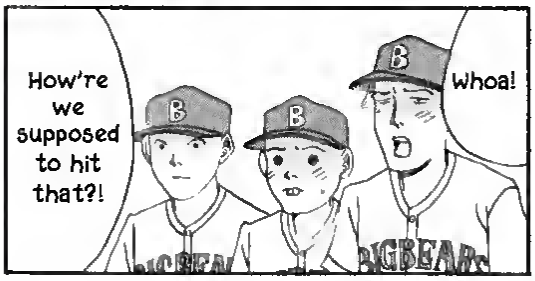


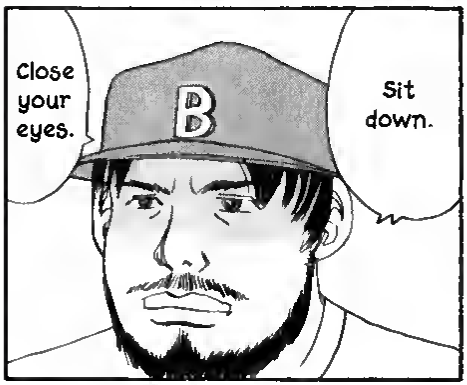
Chapter 11 The Rhythm Song

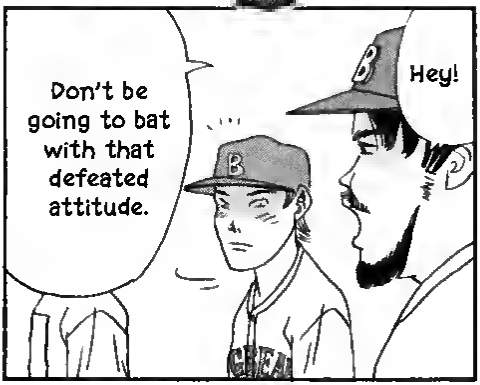

TN 1 2 3 4 5
BEARS 0 0 0 0 0
EAGLES 0 0 3 0 0

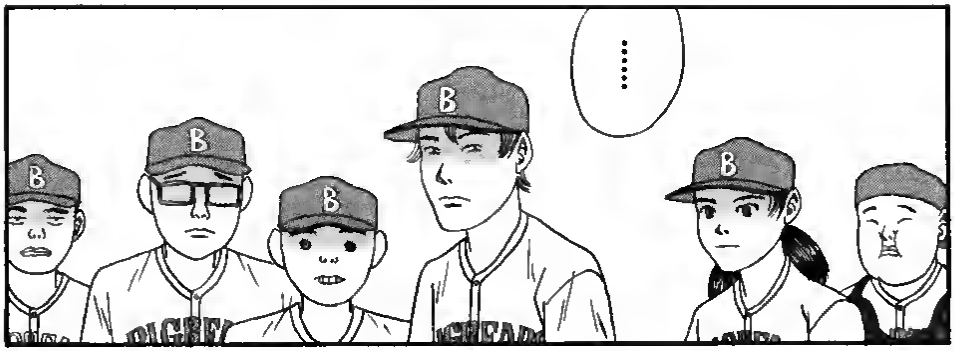
S
B
O
TN
BEARS
EAGLES
R
0
3


BAM


How're we supposed to hit that?!
Whoa!

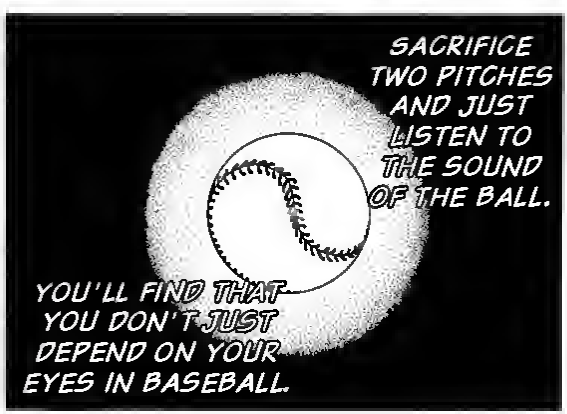

Close your eyes.
Sit down.

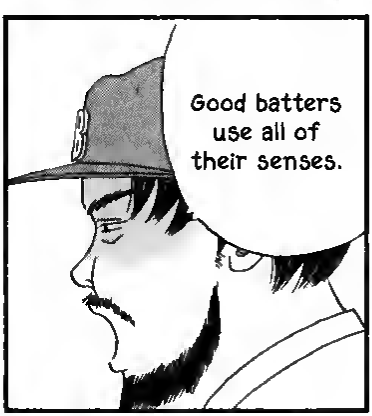

Don't be going to bat with that defeated attitude.
Hey!


.....

There's no way we can copy Uta.
Huh?
No way...

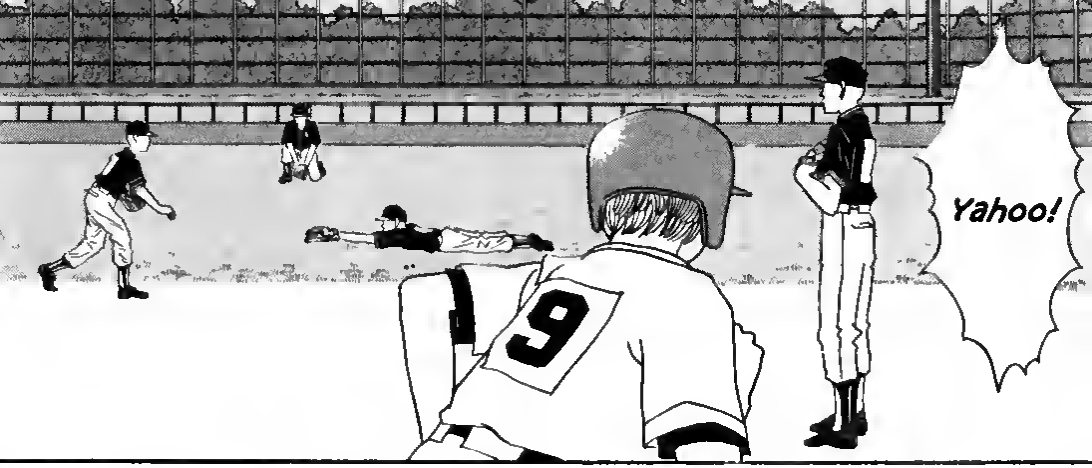
Close your eyes when you get up to bat.
Just like Uta did...
BIGBEAR
8
3


SACRIFICE TWO PITCHES AND JUST LISTEN TO THE SOUND OF THE BALL.
YOU'LL FIND THAT YOU DON'T JUST DEPEND ON YOUR EYES IN BASEBALL.


Good batters use all of their senses.

WHAT IS THE COACH TALKING ABOUT?
I DON'T GET IT.
SEE?
IT'S OVER...
Strike two!
THERE'S NO WAY I CAN HIT IT.
ACK! IT'S BLINDING!
Ejima, listen!

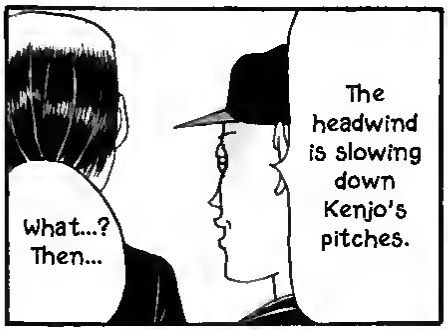
HE'S TAKING ME OUT IN THREE PITCHES!
HE'S GONNA THROW A GREAT ONE...!
IT'S COMING ...!
HUH? THE BALL...
キイン
KLANG
IT LOOKS LIKE IT'S IN SLOW MOTION!

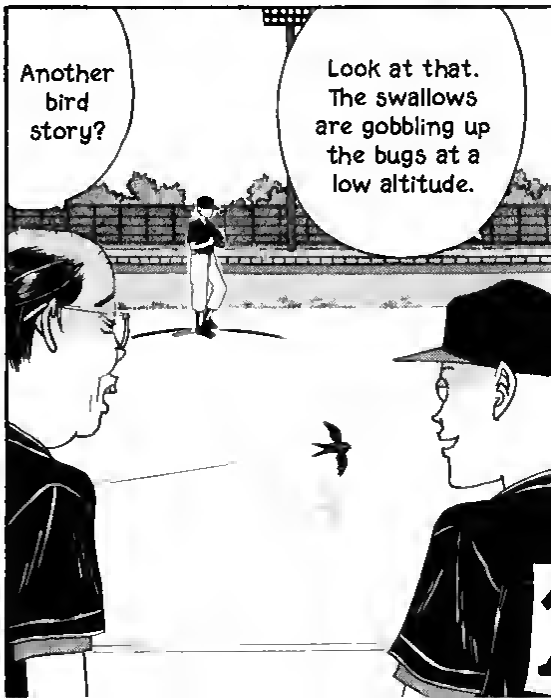

Yahoo!

Heh heh...

There's no way that technique should work.
Hey, Marume, what's going on?

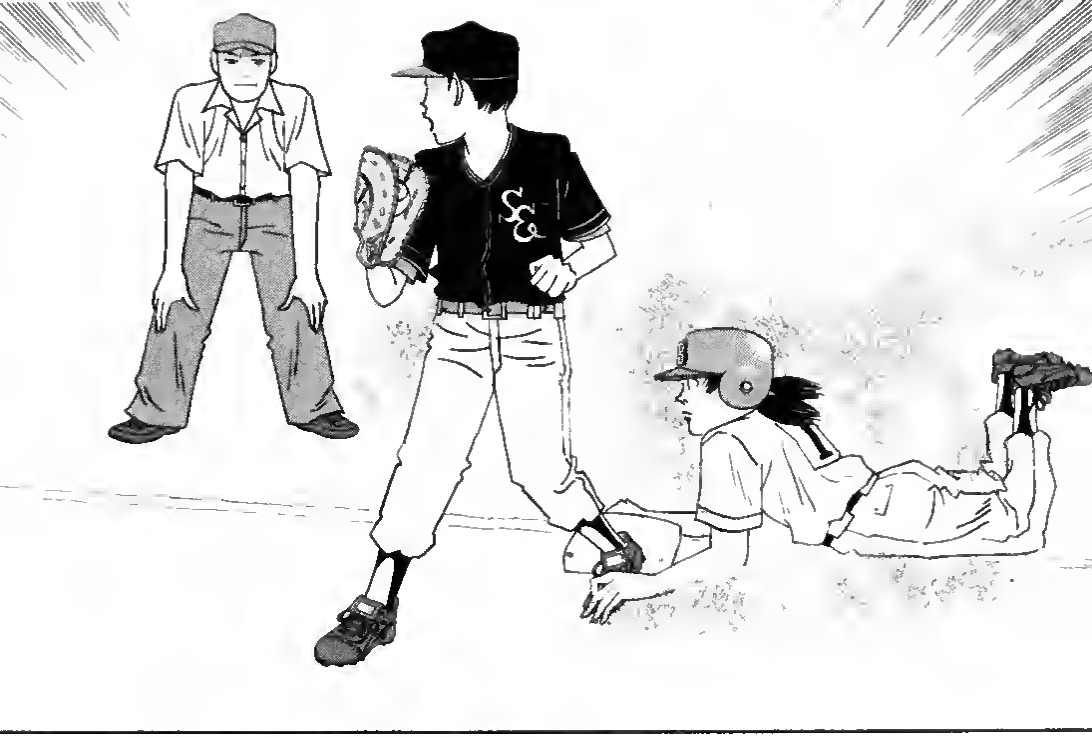
...has come down to the ground.
The wind that was swirling up high...


What...? Then...
The headwind is slowing down Kenjo's pitches.

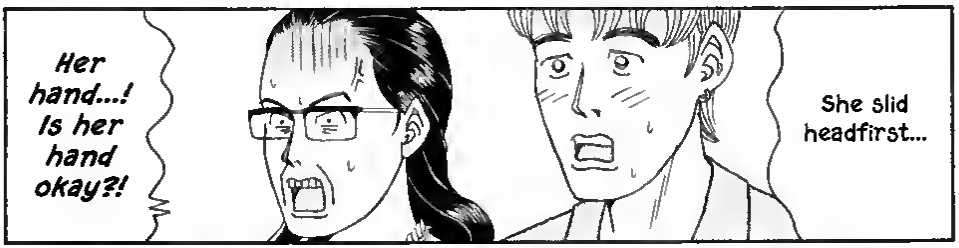

Another bird story?
Look at that. The swallows are gobbling up the bugs at a low altitude.

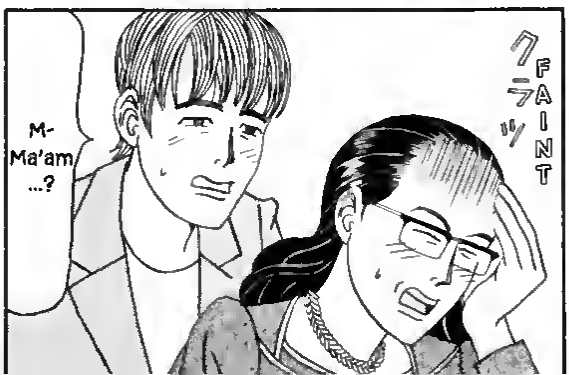
SWIF
SWIF
Kenjo!
Uta, we're counting on you!
NOD
THIS PITCH...!

Damn!
Crap!
Third base!
ガキーン
KONK
シャッ
WOOSH



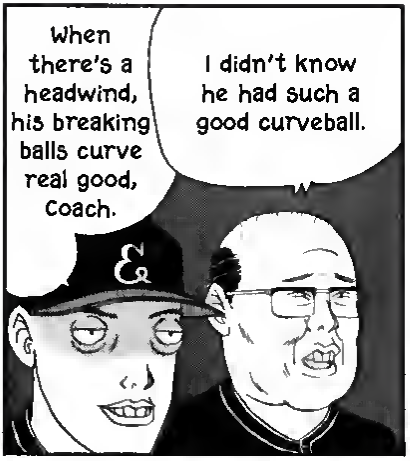
Safe!

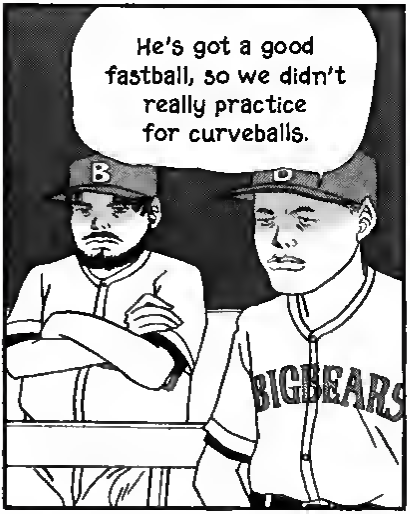

Her hand...! Is her hand okay?!
She slid headfirst...


M-Ma'am ...?
クラッ
FAINT

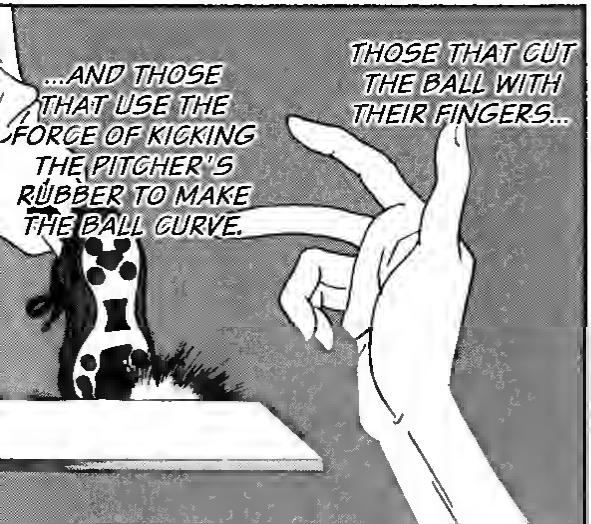
B
3
BIGBEARS

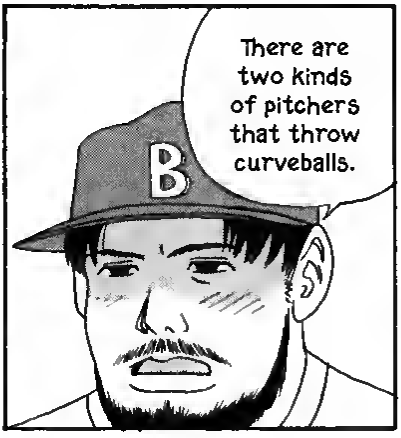
Crap ...
She just got lucky.
Let's keep it up!
Yes!
If he can throw that on top of everything else, there's no way we can hit it...
Huh?
It was a curveball.
That pitch...


When there's a headwind, his breaking balls curve real good, Coach.
I didn't know he had such a good curveball.

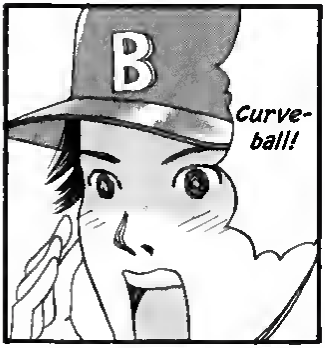

He's got a good fastball, so we didn't really practice for curveballs.
BIGBEARS

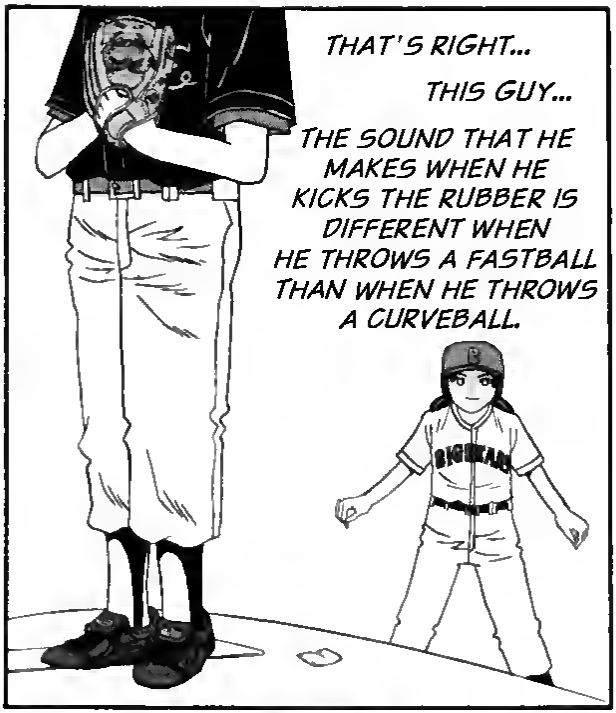
Strike three! You're out!

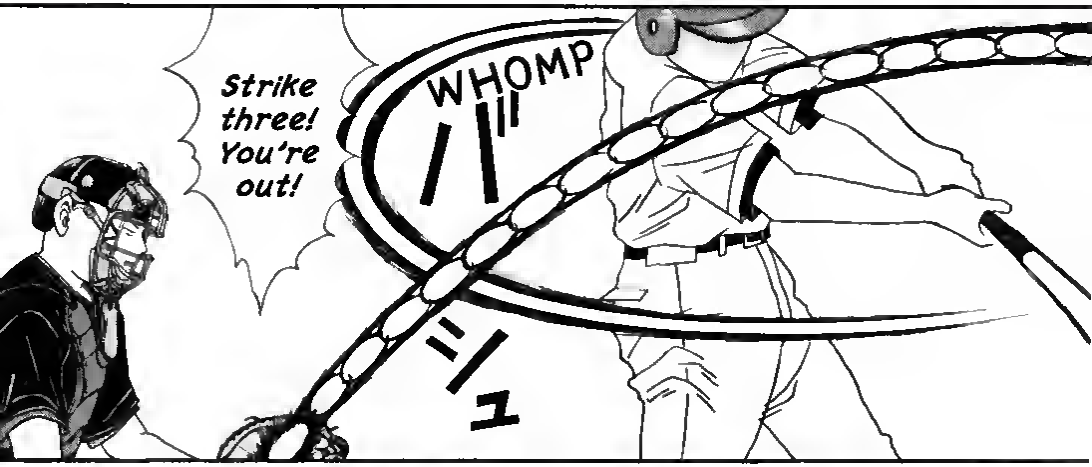

...AND THOSE THAT USE THE FORCE OF KICKING THE PITCHER'S RUBBER TO MAKE THE BALL CURVE.
THOSE THAT CUT THE BALL WITH THEIR FINGERS...


There are two kinds of pitchers that throw curveballs.

SHUFF

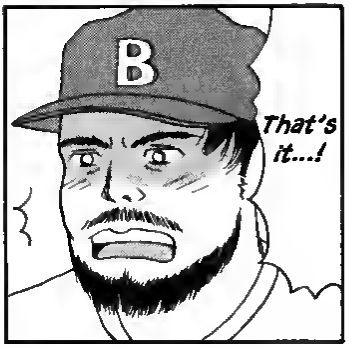

Curve-
ball!

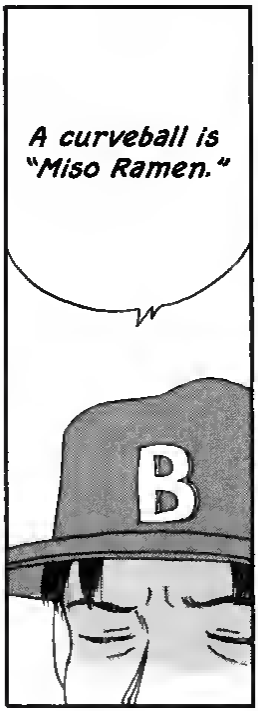

THAT'S RIGHT...
THIS GUY...
THE SOUND THAT HE MAKES WHEN HE KICKS THE RUBBER IS DIFFERENT WHEN HE THROWS A FASTBALL THAN WHEN HE THROWS A CURVEBALL.


Strike three! You're out!
WHOMP

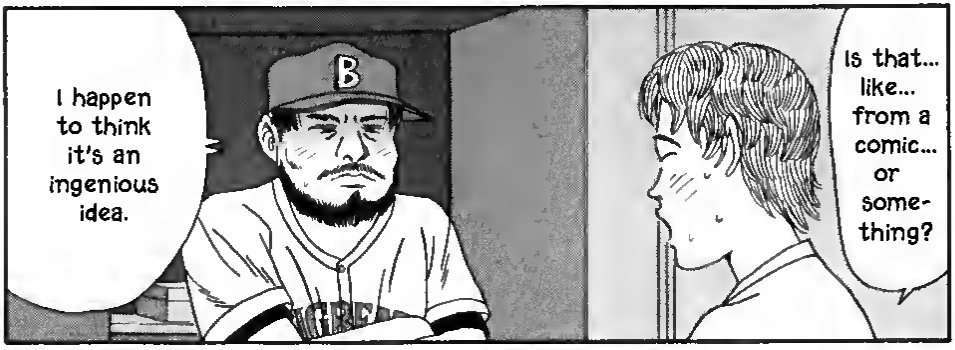
It's just a matter of getting the timing...
Ugh... Two outs.

I just thought of something, Kitami!


That's it...!


A curveball is "Miso Ramen."

Say "Chashu-men" to time your swing.


I happen to think it's an ingenious idea.
Is that... like... from a comic... or some-thing?

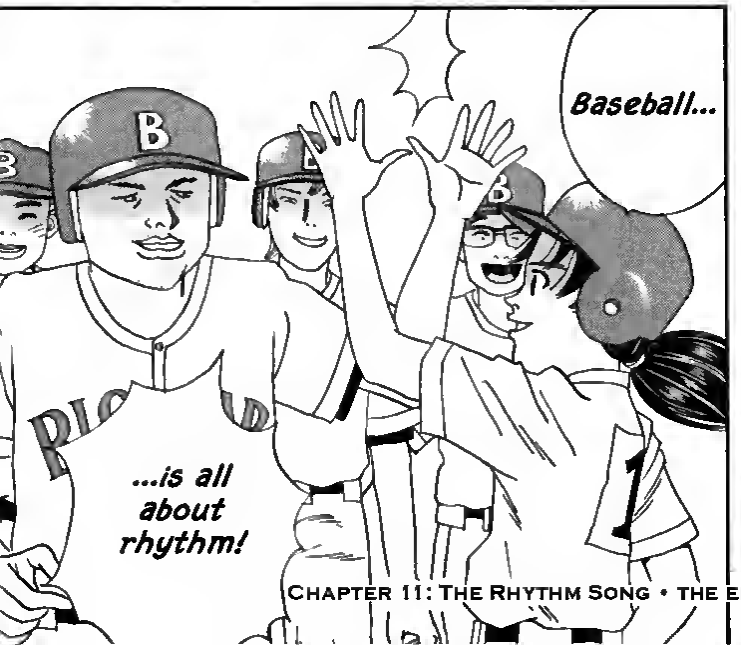
Strike!
Men!
WHIFF
Shu...
Cha...
B
Bee...
?
...THE PITCHER'S RHYTHM.
THAT'S RIGHT. WE JUST NEED TO FIGURE OUT...

キイイ
KRAK
Ven!
Tho...
Huh?
アッ
RAHH
Yes!
Did you get that timing just now, Nagatsuda?!
Don't make a fool outta me.
I told you to use your fastball as a waste pitch...
Fool...
Two outs, bases loaded!

Isn't it obvious?
Besides! What am I supposed to do if it's a curveball?!
Ulp.
Tako...
Shos...
Vich!

A pop-up! Shortstop!
No way...!
Center field!
It's riding on the wind!

A come-from-behind bases-loaded home run!
It's outta here!
BEARS 0 0 0 0 0
EAGLES 0 0 3 0 0


Baseball...
...is all about rhythm!

STAFF

高原拓也
奥堀達也
小岩井誠
宮尾葉子
伊東麻美子
成松由佳
柳沼優子
栗田加奈子
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大谷二郎
酒井さやか
蜂谷智子
佐草夏美

EDITOR

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ACTION COMICS
神童I

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